WOLFVILLE FOLKS

ALFRED HENRY LEWIS

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WOLFVILLE FOLKS

"They gets simultaneous eyes on Rose."

WOLFVILLE FOLKS

By

ALFRED HENRY LEWIS

Author of

"Wolfville," "The Story of Andrew Jackson,"

"The Story of Aaron Burr," etc.

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TO

IRVING JEFFERSON LEWIS

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WOLFVILLE FOLKS

CHAPTER I

THE WIDOW DANGEROUS

WHICH I've told you," observed the Old Cattleman, puffing at his briar pipe—"which I've already told you how Missis Rucker goes on surroundin' old Rucker with connoobial joy to sech a degree that, one mornin' when her wifely back is turned, he ups an' stampedes off into the hills, an' takes refutch with the Apaches. But I never reelates how he gets aroused to his dooty as a husband, an' returns. That mir'cle comes to pass in this wise." Following a reminiscent, smoke-filled pause, the old gentleman continued: "When Rucker is guilty of this yere desertion, Wolfville says nothin' an' does nothin'. It is no part of Wolfville's commoonal respons'bility, as it sees the same, to go pirootin' off on the trail of Rucker, with a purpose of draggin' him back that a-way to his domestic happiness. His elopment is wholly a private play, an' one wharin we ain't entitled to ask for kyards. Shorely not, wantin' speesific requests from Missis Rucker so to do; an' sech don't come.

"On the imme'jit heels of Rucker's plunge into savagery, Missis Rucker never alloods to him—never

lets on she so much as notices his absence. She contin-yoos to deal her game at the O. K. Restauraw onmoved; she fries our daily salthoss, an' compiles our daily flap-jacks—six to the stack—an' neither bats an eye nor wags a y'ear concernin' that vanished husband.

"Nacherally, thar ain't no one so prodded of a morbid cur'osity as to go askin' Missis Rucker. With her views as to what's comin' to her as a lady, an' her bein' allers in the kitchen, surrounded by sech weepons as flatirons an' griddles an' stove-lifters, any sech impolite break might result disasterous. Old Man Enright puts it right, an' his views gains endorsement by Doc Peets, an' others among the best intellects of the camp.

"'To go pesterin' around Missis Rucker,' says he, 'in her bereavements, would be ongentlemanly to the verge of bein' rash, an' the gent don't live in Wolfville who's that foolishly oncooth.'

"If mem'ry is sittin' squar'ly in the saddle, I reckon now it's mebby a year before Missis Rucker mentions her loss. It's one time when we-all shows up for chuck, an' finds her in a dress as black as a spade flush.

"'The same bein' mournin', she explains, in answer to a remark by Doc Peets complimentin' her looks—which Peets was the genteelest sharp, an' the best edicated, that ever dwells in Arizona. 'I'm mournin' for my departed he'pmeet. I hears about it in Tucson. Pore Rucker is deceased; an' of course I dons black, as markin' his cashin' in.'

"Yere Missis Rucker snuffles a little, an' gouges into one corner of her eye with her handkerchief, like she's

roundin' up a tear. After which, she sort o' runs a calk'latin' glance over us gents, then an' thar assembled, like she's sizin' us up as to what you-all might call our domestic p'ints.

"Thar's a heap of silence follows that look. Not bein' gifted none as a mind reader, I can't say how it affects the balance of the outfit; but, speakin' for myse'f personal, a chill like ice creeps up an' down my back. Also, I observes a appreehensive look on the faces of Enright an' Boggs, as though they smells a peril. As to Texas Thompson, who is camped next to me at the table, an' has had marital experiences which culminates in a divorce down Laredo way, I overhears him grind his teeth, plenty determined, an' mutter:

"'By the Lone Star of my natif state, I won't be took!'

"We're all some eager to ask about them tidings which Missis Rucker ropes onto in Tucson, but none has the nerve. It's Faro Nell who comes headin' to the general rescoo. She's perched next to Cherokee Hall, an' looks gently up from a piece of pie she's backin' off the board, and says:

"'Good sakes, Missis Rucker! An' whatever do you-all track up ag'inst about pore Mister Rucker?'

"'That onforchoonate pard o' my bos'm has departed this life,' responds the widow, moppin' away her grief. 'I crosses up with a Tucson party, who asshores me that, when them Apaches goes all spraddled out last spring, they nacherally begins them hostilities by prouncin' on Rucker, an' leavin' him on both sides of the canyon.'

"'That's right!' chimes in Dave Tutt, who, bein'

married a whole lot to Tucson Jennie, feels immune from further wedlock. "Whenever them savages digs up the waraxe, they yoosually inaugurates negotiations by layin' out what palefaces is weak-minded enough to be among 'em, too dead to skin. No; it ain't crooelty, it's caution. Which they figgers them squaw-men, if spared, will be off to the nearest army post, with preematoor word of the uprisin'. Wharfore, they descends on 'em like a fallin' star, an' blots 'em out. After which, they proceeds with their reg'lar killin' an' skelpin' more at leesure.'

"It's over in the Red Light, to which we reepairs when feed is through, that the subject comes up in form. Black Jack, the barkeep, is so impressed by the gravity on our faces as we files in, that he announces the drinks is on the house. We refooses; it bein' too close on the hocks of that salthoss an' them flapjacks for nose-paint, an' we takes seegyars instead. When we're smokin' sociable, an' in spite of them alarmin' fulminations of Missis Rucker, has become somewhat onbuckled an' confident ag'in, Enright brings the topic for'ard.

"'About her bein' a widow that a-way, Doc?' he says, addressin' Peets. 'What do you-all, as a scientist, think yourse'f?'

"'Which it seems feasable enough,' reesponds Peets, bitin' thoughtful at his seegyar. 'You know what Injuns be? Startin' out to slay that a-way, they ain't apt to overlook no sech bet as Rucker. They'd be onto him, first flash out o' the box, like a mink onto a settin' hen.'

"'Yes,' returns Enright, some oneasy as to tone; 'I reckon you calls the turn, Doc. They'd about bump off old Rucker by way of curtain raiser, as they calls it over to the Bird Cage Op'ry House.'

"'Don't you allow now,' breaks in Boggs, some agitated an' appealin' to Enright an' Peets together—'don't you allow now, that old Rucker bein' wiped out that a-way, sort o' leaves the camp ongyarded?'

"'As how?' returns Peets.

"'As how?' repeats Boggs, his excitement risin'. 'What's to prevent her deescendin' onto one of us, like a pan of milk from a top shelf, an' weddin' him a heap? She's a mighty resoloote female, is Missis Rucker, an' it's only last week she ups an' saws it off on me, all casyooal, that she's jest thirty-eight years old last grass. I sees her drift now! That lady's makin' ready for a spring. Which she's aimin' to snatch a husband from our shrinkin' midst; an' nothin' short!'

"'After what I passes through with that Laredo wife of mine,' says Texas Thompson, grim as tombstones, 'you can gamble a bloo stack I'll never be wedded alive!'

"'As to myse'f,' reemarks Peets, imitatin' a cheerful countenance, 'I'm barred. Drug sharps, onder the rooles, cannot be claimed in private matrimony—belongin' as they do to the whole commoonity. Enright, yere, is likewise out, bein' too old.'

"'That's right!' coincides Enright, relief stealin' into his eyes; 'I'm too far gone in years to become raw material for nuptials. Speakin' what I feel, however, I looks on the sityooation as a heap extreme. As Dan

says, it's plain she has intentions. Then thar's that black frock: Which widows is dangerous in preecise proportion as they sheds tears an' piles on mournin'. It's my onbiased jedgement that she's fixin' her sights for Dan or Texas thar.'

"'Gents,' interrupts Texas Thompson ag'in, his manner iron, 'you hears what I says a moment back! Wolfville may follow me to the tomb, but never to no altar.'

"'If I thought this yere widow was that iminent,' says Boggs, pacin' to an' fro like a startled wildcat, 'I'd line out for Tucson ontil the footure's more guaranteed. I'm nacherally plumb nervous; I can't camp down in the shadow of a great threat onmoved. We was shore locoed to ever let Rucker get away that time. We might have knowed it would end in some sech bluff as this. If I had foreseen the trap he was settin' for us, I'd have reestored that old profligate to Missis Rucker's arms, or got downed by the Apaches tryin'. Whatever's your advice, Sam?' he concloods, gazin' anxious-eyed at Enright. 'If it was nothin' worse than a hostile sheriff on my trail, I'd stand my hand; but this yere is when I reequires counsel.'

"Seein' Boggs so keyed up, Enright goes off on a soothin' angle, Peets chippin' in. They both suggests to Boggs that thar's no call to be preecipitate. It'll most likely be weeks before Missis Rucker really declar's herse'f, an' sinks them widowed talons into her seelected prey. Meanwhile, as preparin' for the worst, all Boggs has to do, they argues, is keep his mind on his

number, an' sing out 'No' to everything she says. Likewise, it might be as well to hold a pony saddled in the corral, in case of sudden swoops.

"'In which event,' says Enright, 'if it turns out we onderestimates her activities an' she wheels on you abrupt, thar's the pony; an' you plays the same—quirt an' heel—as a last resort. Still, it's possible we're secin' onnecessary ghosts. She may have it in her heart to make happy some other gent entire.'

"'Thar's one thing,' observes Peets; 'I wants it onderstood, in case this conference comes to Missis Rucker's notice later, that I say she is an esteemable lady, an' cal'klated to raise the gent, so forchoonate as to become her husband, to pinnacles of bliss.'

"'Also,' declar's Enright, some hasty, 'let it be onderstood that I'm in on them observations. As the preesidin' inflooence of the O. K. Restauraw, Missis Rucker is onapproached an' onapproachable—her pies is poems an' her beans a dream, as I've said former.'

"It happens, as it frequent does, that these yere preemonitions of the camp is onsustained. Not that I blames Boggs an' the rest for entertainin' 'em. After he crosses to the sunset side of the Missouri, a gent can't be too proodent, 'speshully in the matter of widows. When one of them forlorn ladies spreads her pinions, an' takes to sailin' an' soarin' an' soarin' an' sailin' that away, it's time for every single gent to break for cover.

"No; as I states, the timidities of Boggs an' the balance ain't upheld. Not that Missis Rucker don't frame it up none to come flutterin' from her lonely perch; only it

ain't Boggs or Texas or any of the boys proper, it's old Colonel Coyote Clubbs on whom she's closin' down.

"You recalls how, yeretofore, I onfurls to you concernin' the little Colonel?—how he's grizzled, an' harmless, an' dried, an' lame of the nigh hind laig?—how he's got a face like a squinch owl?—innocent an' wide-eyed an' full of ignorant wonder, like life is an onendin' s'prise party? As I then explains, he's p'isenin' coyotes—a dollar a pelt—an' at first has a camp an hour's ride over towards Tucson. Mebby it's two months prior to when Missis Rucker gives it out she's alone in the world, an' goes to ghost dancin', he's done give up his dugout, an' took to boardin' at the O. K. Restauraw. Bein' gregar'ous, the Colonel likes company; an' as for them little wolves, they're as prolific an' as apt to find his arsenic in the subbubs of Wolfville itse'f, as farther out on the plains. So, as I observes, he's now gettin' his *chili-con-carne* at Missis Rucker's, an' workin' out from camp instead of into it.

"Which it's plenty likely we-all would have seen it was the Colonel's personal trouble from the jump, only the day Missis Rucker goes into black an' scares us up that a-way, the old cimarron is across to Red Dog, dealin' for a train of burros to pack his wolf pelts to Tucson. As it is, it ain't a day after he gets back before we identifies him as the gent in interest. Missis Rucker, as though concealment is now at an end an' the hour ripe for throwin' off disguises, takes to hoverin' over him at chuck time, with a terrifyin' solicitood that comes mighty clost to bein' tenderness. She takes to heapin' his plate

with viands, to a degree that's enough of itse'f to set any sport of thoughtfulness to jumpin' sideways. It shore rattles the Colonel, you bet! an' his appetite gets less the more she lavishes them delicacies upon him.

"'Which you ain't eatin' more than sparrer birds, Colonel!' she says, givin' him a most onmistakable grin. 'Yere; let me get you some plum preeserves—which they ought to tempt a angel!'

"With that she totes forth one of her partic'ler air-tights, which even Enright don't get a glimpse of only Fo'th of Jooly an' Christmas, an' onloads the same on the Colonel. He grows white at this; for, jest as the good book says that it's vain for the fowler to spread his nets in the sight of any bird, so also is it footile for a widow to go inondatin' any speshul gent with plum preeserves, an' hope to have them sweetmeats misconstrooed.

"Shore, the Colonel—for all he's the guilelessest party that ever makes a moccasin track in Arizona—realizes she's put him in nom'nation to be Rucker's successor. Likewise the whole outfit grasps this trooth; an', while the Colonel is turnin' gray about the gills, Boggs is breathin' freer, an' the desperate look in the eyes of Texas Thompson begins to fade away. Which the same shows how, at bottom, man is a anamile utterly selfish. Once Boggs an' Texas an' them others feels safe, the knowledge that the pore old Colonel must go cavortin' across the red-hot plow shares, don't bother 'em a bit. But sech is life! They coldly leaves him to tread the wine press alone; an' all as onfeelin' as a band of

prairie dogs. Which I don't scroople later, to reeproach Boggs with this yere lack of sympathy.

"'What can we-all do?' he replies. 'I'm a friend of the Colonel's; but what then? This is a case whar every gent must kill his own snakes. Besides I see now she's doo to make him happy. Do you note how free she plays them plum air-tights on him? An' no more holdin' back than if they're canned tomatters! Rightly looked at, the Colonel's in a heap of luck.'

"'Luck or no luck,' says Enright, 'the hands of Wolfville is tied. The camp has an onbroken record of backin' every matrimonial venture as soon as seen. Don't we put down the Washwoman's War, by weddin' French to one of the contendin' females? Ain't we thar with the goods on the occasion of Tucson Jennie takin' Dave for better or for worse? An', ag'in when that pinfeather person, Toad Allen, comes squanderin' along with old Gleggs' girl, Abby? Also, ain't said course resulted in sech onmixed triumphs as that blessed infant Enright Peets Tutt? No; it's Wolfville's system to play wedlock to win. An', while I won't go so far as to say that, in the present instance, we remains inert in case it's Dan or Texas—said gents bein' entitled to partic'ler consid'ration—now it turns out to be the Colonel who's to draw the prize, Wolfville stands nootral. Barkeep, bring on the nose-paint. Inasmuch as I trusts that all will regyard these yere words of mine as final, it is meet we should yoonite in drinkin' onbridled victory to Missis Rucker, an' the gent she's honored with her preferences.'

"'Thar's one syllable I'd like to edge in,' says Boggs, when he's emptied his glass. 'Don't you-all reckon, Sam, that some of us oughter ride herd on the Colonel till she's tied him down? He's a gent of honor, an' as clean strain as hornets; but thar's fates before which even the gamest sperit breaks ground. An' you sees yourse'f that, if the Colonel should *vamos*, it onkivers others to attack.'

"'Which them cautionary moves,' says Enright, 'might not be thrown away. Although, I'm frank to say, it's four for one the Colonel meets his happiness onflinchin'ly. He's too p'lite, that a-way however much he may distrust his merits, to fly from the affections of a lady an' take to hidin' out.'"

CHAPTER II

THE RETURN OF RUCKER

ENRIGHT is plumb c'rrect in his count-up of the Colonel. As Boggs observes, he's game as t'rantlers. Still, it ain't his sand, it's his onswervin' p'liteness an' good manners that's bound to hold him. Said trooth is evident when the Colonel discusses this new an' surprisin' slant in his fortunes with Enright an' Peets. This yere caucus occurs two days later, after Missis Rucker offers him her hand.

"It's about second drink time in the evenin' when the Colonel, lookin' pale an' shaken, comes totterin' into the Red Light, askin' for Enright. Cherokee Hall, with Faro Nell on the look-out's stool, is dealin' bank at the time, an' divers of us is seein' what we can do ag'inst him; but, at sight of the Colonel's face, one an' all we cashes in. Cherokee cleans up his game, an' we-all gathers about to listen.

"'Which you've no objections, Colonel,' asks Enright, mighty urbane, 'to the camp bein' in on this powwow none? From the rapt look in your eyes, I sort o' guesses what joyful things has happened, an' of course if—bein' over-delicate, mebby, in affairs of the heart—you preefers this confab private, why then, nacherally, your wishes should be regyarded, an' private's the word.'

"But the Colonel says he waives privacy. The camp to a man is his friend, an' plumb welcome to his confidence. Hearin' which, we draws up in silence, waitin' for him to begin. As we does so, Cherokee whispers to Faro Nell that mighty likely she'd better put on her shaker, stampede across, an' congratulate Missis Rucker; which su'gestion she yields to reluctant, preferrin' to listen to them adventures of the Colonel.

"'It's this a-way,' says the Colonel, when Faro Nell is gone an' everybody's organized comfortable. 'Which it's onnecessary for me to go tellin' a passel of sech experienced sharps as you-all what's took place. Suffice it that this evenin', after supper is over an' her dishes is washed, she drives me into a corner an' tells me she is mine. Now onderstand, gents all: I'm too much a slave to etiquette, an' was too well brought up by my folks, to go backin' out of the love of any lady. Which I've allers held that a lady is not to be refoosed. Her heart is ever a boon; an' once she bestows it, no gent so distinguished is possessed of any crooel license to go shovin' back his cha'r or indulgin' in cold feet.'

"'Which them sentiments does you credit, Colonel,' observes Enright, as the comin' bridegroom pauses to wipe his for'head.

"'That's whatever,' breaks in Boggs, emphatic.

"'No, sir,' resoomes the Colonel, when he ag'in commands himse'f, 'a lady is not to be declined. That is, she's not to be declined, assoomin' her to be free. It's on that p'int, an' that alone, I've come meanderin' over to be heard. What I asks is the one question: Is this

yere old man Rucker shorely dead? What I urges is that, ontil the same be proved, I'm entitled to a stay of execootion. I leaves it all to you—to you Enright, an' to you Peets, do I ask too much? Lookin' at the play from every angle, an' keepin' it before you that my sole reason for balkin' is a reason of morality, I puts it, as gent to gent, whether I ain't right?'

"'This yere is a mere quibble!' shouts Boggs, plenty heated; but Enright, who's the soul of fairness, stops him.

"'It's impossible to deny,' responds Enright, when Boggs growlin'ly subsides, 'that the proof, techin' the wipin' out of Rucker, an' the consequent widowhood of his relict, is at present some meager. Also, I'm bound to add that Wolfville, as a strictly moral camp, ain't hungerin' for no Enoch Arden games. What's your jedgement, Doc?'

"'Which I entertains feelin's sim'lar,' returns Peets. 'We shore don't want to go ribbin' up no sityooation where one lady has two husbands. Thar's everything to be said ag'inst sech a solecism, not only from stand-p'ints moral but economic. Besides, Red Dog, our hated rival, wouldn't cease to throw it up.'

"'The question bein' gen'ral in its op'rations,' breaks in Boggs ag'in—he's been whisperin' mighty feverish to Texas Thompson—'an', speakin' for Texas yere as well as myse'f, I'd like to ask the Colonel, now he casts doubts on a revered lady's widowhood, whatever is to be his ensooin' move? Also, I desires to be heard as sayin' that, offerin' as he does them doubts by way of defence, the

burden of proof is on him. It's for him to show the lady's married, not for Wolfville to demonstrate she's single.'

"'Gents,' says the Colonel, interruptin' Enright as he's about to reply, 'words is onnecessary. I accepts the p'sition of Mister Boggs, as bein' sound an' solid as a sod house. All I asks is time. I've but one request—an' I bases it, as yeretofore announced, on purely moral grounds. I merely asks that you hold Missis Rucker at bay, while I takes the trail of that former husband, an' runs it out. Mebby them hostiles don't kill him none. Mebby he lives in safety, while gents who are blameless go facin' delights which of right belong to him alone.'

"'How long,' asks Enright, 'do you-all allow it'll take to settle the life or death of Rucker? You can see yourse'f, Colonel, thar's a limit ought to go with this. It would be preeposterous to assoome that you are to hold the affections of a lady in abeyance, while you go romancin' about in the hills indefinite.'

"'Six months,' returns the Colonel, pleadin'ly, 'six little months is all I ask. If I don't drive this yere absconder into the open by then, I'll return an' accept my joy without a quiver.'

"'Thar's nothin' to it, Sam!' remarks Peets, an' his manner is decisive; 'the Colonel's plumb inside his rights. That Rucker is dead rests wholly on the feather-blown bluff of some onnamed sport in Tucson. At the most, sech a condition furnishes us nothin' more cogent than suspicions. Shorely bigamy ought not to be com-

mitted, an' the good repoote of Wolfville resked or trifled away on argyooments so insecure.'

"'You're right, Doc,' says Enright musin'ly. 'Which our stand bein' taken, it's my jedgement the Colonel better begin his still hunt instanter, an' not wait ontil the lady becomes privy to his designs. She might take them doubts about her widowhood invidious.'

"Enright's notion as to promptitoode prevails, an' the Colonel allows he'll go trackin' off for Rucker that very evenin'. Tharupon Boggs—he's been watchful as a lynx throughout—ag'in intervenes.

"'As gents possessin' collat'ral interests,' says he, 'Texas an' I'll jest about accompany the Colonel a whole lot.'

"'Which you ain't intimatin' that I'd break my compact none about returnin'?' asks the Colonel, his eyes beginnin' to sparkle.

"'Not at all!' returns Boggs. 'We're goin' along in the c'pacity of guardian angels to you personal. Them Apaches might down you; an' thar's too much dependin' on your life for us to take them chances.'

"While the ponies is bein' saddled an' brought up, an' Black Jack is fillin' the canteens, Enright draws Peets aside.

"'How about it, Doc?' he whispers. 'Would you-all let Dan an' Texas both go?'

"'An' why not?' asks Peets.

"'This why not. S'ppose, for any conceiv'ble reason, none of them parties comes back? You don't want to forget that you an' me are the next two chickens on the

roost. How do you know, in sech events, your profession as a medicine sharp, or my years, protects us? Remember, Missis Rucker ain't no girl!'

"'That's all right!' returns Peets, confident an' firm. 'If Dan an' Texas an' the Colonel fails us, as a last resort we'll emyoolate the ancient Romans. When they wanted wives, they jumped an outfit called the Sabines, an' mavericked 'em. That's what we'll do if forced. When things get dealt down to the turn, an' thar's nothin' but you an' me in the matrimonial box, we'll nacherally ride over to Red Dog, an' rope Missis Rucker up a he'pmeet from among that hamlet's deboshed citizenry. Thar's them in Red Dog who, at the simple mention, would come a-runnin'.'

"It's the next day before Missis Rucker learns how the Colonel, with Boggs an' Texas coverin' the play, has gone rummagin' off after the deefaulter. When she hears of it, she searches out Enright whar he's buyin' shirts in the New York Store. Faro Nell an' Tucson Jennie is with her, an' the three look plenty ominous an' warm.

"'Which I deemands to know, Sam Enright,' says Missis Rucker, her manner mighty trucyoolent, 'what you an' Doc Peets means?'

"'Yes,' choruses the other two; 'what do you-all mean?'

"'Do you reckon I'll allow you two sots to go knockin' around in my destinies, like blind dogs in a meat shop?' adds Missis Rucker.

"'My dear Madam,' reemonstrates Enright, placatin'

her; 'what we does is wholly for your deefence. Says we, "Colonel, you can't have that lady ontil you proves concloosive she's a single footer. She's a prize worth strugglin' for an' waitin' for; an', if you're worthy of her, you won't begretch the time an' labor to prodooce them proofs that her former husband is defunct." The Colonel struggles ag'inst this yere dictum, for his love is over-powerin'. But he is also a gent of reason, so at last he submits.'

"'This yere'll do for a sing-song, Sam Enright!' returns Missis Rucker—none the less she's softened by them encomiums—'but whyever don't the Colonel bid me a fond adoo?'

"'Which he couldn't have stood it none,' declar's Enright. 'He says so himse'f. "Let's start at once!" is his observation. "If ever I sets eyes on her feechures, their alloorin' loveliness will carry my resolootion off its feet." An' so—the Doc an' I an' Boggs an' Texas concurrin'—they goes prancin' off for the mountains, without further procrastinations.'

"'All right, Sam Enright,' remarks Missis Rucker after thinkin' a spell, her tones full of meanin'; 'since you-all sees fit to pick up my hand an' play it, you'd shore better make it win. You can gamble the limit, if my Colonel don't come back to me no more, I'll jest the same know what to do.'

"'You hears her, Doc!' whispers Enright; an', cool an' steady as he is, he can't reepress a shudder.

"However, the kyards falls as they should. It ain't three weeks before the Colonel, with Boggs an' Texas,

comes ridin' in, whoopin' an' shoutin' triumphant. Which thar's reason in their whoops; for along with 'em, his feet tied onderneath a pony, is Rucker, lookin' as morose as a captive badger. Thar's an Apache ridin' along, who's out to offer explanations an' take the Rucker pony back ag'in—the same bein' his chattle.

"'Which I informs this aborigine,' explains Boggs, in eloocidation of the Apache that a-way, 'he's been harborin' a criminal in this yere foogitive Rucker. I tells him he'll play in luck if the Great Father don't send his big thunder guns, to blow him an' his outfit off the map. I hands him these fictions for fear, if once he grasps what we really aims to do with pore Rucker, his hoomanity gets to millin', an' he turns loose in his blinded way an' gives us a battle.'

"'Well! well!' says Texas Thompson, as he swings from the saddle, an' sa'nters into the Red Light to wash the alkali dust from his throat; 'now it's over, I'm yere to say I feels a lot relieved. It ain't over-statin' the case, gents, when I announces that it's the first time, since ever Missis Rucker puts on black an' gives it out she's single, I've felt my old-time se'f.'

"As to the Apache, Enright asshores him no apologies is necessary. Meanwhile the Colonel—who's sort o' hysterical—heaps that savage with presents to the y'ears. He certainly does endow that painted outcast with half the New York Store!

"'Whar did you-all run up on him, Dan?' asks Peets, alloodin' to Rucker.

"'Which we discovers the old groundhawg,' says Boggs,

'in camp with them Apaches; an' all as contented as a toad onder a cabbage leaf. The outfit he's with warn't on no warpath. It's that bunch over by the Cow Springs, with which these yere Injuns of Rucker's ain't been on speakin' terms for moons, that dug up the waraxe last spring. It's my belief this deceitful Rucker starts them tales about his death himse'f. It would be jest his speed; for he's as cunnin' that a-way as a pet fox.'

"When the foogitive is reestored to Missis Rucker, that lady never says a word. She looks sour as lemons though; an' the glances she casts at Enright an' Peets borders on the baleful.

"'An' I ain't above remarkin', Sam,' observes Peets to Enright, commentin' on them glances, 'that—only I knows her to be honest an' troo an' humane at heart—I figger she'd half-way like to put a spider in our biscuit, for roundin' Rucker up.'

"It's the day followin' that exile's return, an', from where we sits in the Red Light, we can see Rucker settin' the table for supper, rattlin' cups, an' slammin' plates about permiscus, an' all a heap egreegious an' recalcitrant.

"'Go over, Jack,' says Enright to Jack Moore, which latter gent acts in the dooal role of marshal, an' kettle-tender for the stranglers—of which arm of Wolfville jestice, Enright is chief—'go over, an' bring that miserable old cimarron to me. I want to give him warnin'.'

"In a moment Jack is back with the old felon, who looks as genial as a sore-head b'ar.

"'See yere, Rucker!' says Enright, his tones ringing

hard an' cold, like iron on ice; 'a word is as good as a thump in the ribs to a blind mule. Now remember! If ever you-all plays the domestic trooant in the footure, an' go abandonin' them feelicities which surrounds you —an' which I fears you are far from appreciatin'— Wolfville rides forth on your trail in a body, an' swings an' rattles tharwith ontil you're took. Also your next return to camp will be signalized not by any reestoration to the lovin' embraces of a wife who dotes on you beyond your measly deserts, but by stringin' you up to the windmill as a warnin' to husbands with tastes for solitood an' travel, an' by way of showin' what happens to a married gent who persistently omits to come home. You go back now to settin' them tables; but, as you do so, b'ar in mind that the Wolfville eye from now has got you focused.'"

CHAPTER III

CHEROKEE HALL, GAMBLER

"WHICH you-all," the Old Cattleman, continued, with a look both confidential and confident, "don't have to be told by now that Cherokee Hall's a gambler. An' while a gent might do better than gamble, leastwise better for himse'f, I allers allows Cherokee can't he'p it none. You see he's gaited congen'tal to take chances—a sort o' preedestined kyard-sharp from the jump.

"Shore, I don't find no fault with gamblers. For that matter I don't find no fault with no gent, onless he's connivin' ag'in me pers'nal; in which eevent I nacherally adopts measures. Moreover, speakin' of gamblers, they're a mighty guileless bevy of folks. Which if the onexpected ever happens, an' I'm took sudden with the notion of sallyin' forth on the trail of mankind, to deplete it of its wealth neefarious, I'll shore adhere to gamblers as my reg'lar prey. As to business men proper, tharby meanin' store-keeps an' sim'lar commercial chiefs of scouts, I'll pass up all sech chilled steel tarrapins complete.

"No; this yere preference as to victims ain't doo to the sooperior savey of business folks; for mere wisdom, them stoodents of trade ain't got nothin' on your kyard-sharps.

But where it comes to standin' pat concernin' money, they've got mere gamblers that a-way left standin' sideways. Business men an' gamblers is onlike each other utter. Their money attitoods is as wide apart as poetry an' prose. An' for this yere essenshul reason: At his game, when a gambler gives, he don't get; an' when he gets, he don't give. Your business gent goes squanderin' through the chute of existence the other way about. He never gives without gettin'; an' he never gets without givin'—assoomin' he's on the level, which he freequent ain't.

"Gamblers an' business men runs opp'site from soda to hock. One takes nothin' but chances; the other takes everything except. A business man never lets go one hold till he's got another; a gambler lets go all holds, an' trusts to out-luck you for a fresh one. Also, thar's other p'ints of sep'ration: For example, a gambler never thinks of lendin' you money ontil you're busted. Which is the preecise eepock a business gent won't let you have a splinter.

"Go weavin' forth an' try it, if you nurses doubts. Approach a kyard-sharp for a stake, an' you with a bundle: That indignant sport'll onbosom himse'f in language to take the nap off your coat. What he says, you bet! will be more decisive than encouragin'—hot, an' plenty explicit. Come around when you're broke, an' he'll revive your faintin' fortunes with half his bankroll. As opposed to this, whenever you goes troopin' up ag'inst a business gent to neegotiate a borry, you'll have to back the play with a bale of secoorities as big as a

roll of kyarpet. He'll want to have 'em in his hand, too, before ever he permits you to so much as lay b'ar your errand.

"Wharfore's this yere difference? You don't have to dig none deep for causes: Gamblers by nacher are romantic; a business gent roosts close to the ground. One is 'motional; the other's as hard an' pulseless as a iron wedge. The former's a bird, an' gaily spends his onthinkin' time among the clouds; the latter never soars higher than he can lift himse'f on wings of bricks an' mortar.

"Likewise gamblers is more excellent as company. When I'm onbuckled, an' romancin' 'round for sociability onp'isened of ulterior designs, I shore searches out your kyard-sharp every time. Gettin' sociable with a business gent, is about as likely a enterprise as winnin' the affections of a burglar-proof safe. Thar's a time-lock goes with his friendship, an' even he himse'f can't break into it none outside of business hours.

"Re-tracin' our trail to the orig'nal prop'sition, I'm yere to say that of all in Wolfville it's likely Cherokee's the most onwary, an' him whose blind side lies openest to the world. Which he's certainly the most ongyarded sport! Plumb honest himse'f, with a dealbox as straight as if laid out in its angles by one of them civil engineer mavericks, the last he's expectin' is the double cross.

"An' at that, if some evil-minded party's out to skin Cherokee, to go settin' traps an' diggin' pitfalls ag'in him would be a waste of time. All that plotter has to do to start Cherokee's *dinero* comin' his way, is set

'round an' look pensive a whole lot. Cherokee's so sympathetic, an' carelessly soft of heart, that to pull on a expression of gloom means, for the cunnin' wolf who dons it, a tenth of all Cherokee's got. Which if he was to track up on ten people in succession, all of 'em down an' out, it's a cinch he'd have to begin life anew.

"While not exyooberant like Boggs, Cherokee's at heart a optimist in a ondeemonstrative way. Likewise, as I says, he's onable to bear other people's sorrows, an' constrooes 'em, when vis'ble, to indicate a utter lack of coin. Once he embraces the latter idee, the end is on its way; life'll be a failure ontil he's reestored the affairs of that busted prairie dog to a cash basis.

"An' if Cherokee can't stake said bankrupt direct, the latter bein' too sens'tive to accept, he'll go jumpin' sideways at him. Some folks grows haughty exactly as they grows poor; they're humble only when they're rich, an' refooses favors onless they can get along without 'em. Whenever Cherokee crosses up with one of these yere high-strung parties, he'plessly in the hole, he goes piroo-tin', mighty cautious, round the flanks of his pride, in-veigles him into some shore-thing racket, an' lets him win himse'f out. Shore; I sees him do it more'n once.

"Gamblers ain't respectable, you says? Well I don't say they be. Which I will remark, however, that when we're all gathered together in the misty be-yond, if some gent who's been lined up for eternal jedg-ment, can't say nothin' for himse'f except he's respect-able, the best thing he can do is pass an' offer to make it a jack.

"As I casts the eye of mem'ry r'arward, thar's no figger more pleasin' than that of Cherokee. Planted over back of his faro-box, Nell up ag'inst his right shoulder lookin' out the play, he's shore a benignant inflooence. As I onderstands, he's foaled orig'nal in Indiana. I once hears some jaundiced trant'ler—which I quotes this verbal pig-nut prior—declar' that Indiana is settled by folks who started for the West but lost their nerve. Sech bluffs don't incloode Cherokee a little bit. He's weak only with the weak, afraid only of the timid. While he's buffaloed by babes an' sucklin's easy, the war-song of the bad man huntin' trouble is as the music of a bridal to his y'ears.

"Likewise Cherokee has views, an' when he's got confidence in his aujience he voices 'em. Once over to the O. K. House at chuck time, some one—Texas I reckons, or mebby now it's Boggs—starts oratin' about ladies; an' lets on that, while they're plumb excellent in a heap of entrancin' reespecks, you-all can't put a bet on 'em, they bein' fitful not to say difoosive in their fancies, an' prone to shift camp on a gent when least looked for.

"Cherokee combats these yere doctrines. 'The same not bein' my experience, none whatever!' says he. Then glancin' at Nell who, pretty as a stack of bloos, is mowin' away her flapjacks an' salt-hoss with the rest of us, he continyoos. 'Ladies is a heap likelier to run troo than gents. Which I've seen a lady hock her frock for the gent she loves. Also, if they ever does quit you, they quits you only in prosperity. Whoever hears of a lady abandonin' a party, an' him down? The same bein'

the time, speakin' gen'ral, your he-friends seelects to murmur *adios.*'

"'Well,' breaks in Texas, 'every sport to his own notion! But I certainly does find myse'f in wrong, when I weds that Laredo wife of mine! Which the too-multuous hours I passes in my capac'ty as a husband, leaves me girl-shy ever since.'

"'Jest the same,' remarks Boggs, 'ladies is mighty alloorin'. The Doc thar'—lookin' over to Peets—'recites some stanzas, about seventh drink-time last evenin', that shore matches my feelin's exact:

> "'Oh woman in our hour of ease,
> Oncertain, coy an' hard to please;
> But seen too oft, familiar with her face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

"'Yes, sir-ee!' concloodes Boggs, dippin' into a can of air-tights, 'you can gamble all you're worth that them's my sent'ments.'

"'Another thing about ladies,' resoomes Cherokee, 'they shore don't go 'round draggin' their verbal lariats an' tellin' things. Ladies is plenty reticent an' moote about what they knows.'

"'Some of 'em, however,' grumbles Texas, 'is plenty commoonicative touchin' what they don't know. It ain't her tellin' things of which she's aware, wharby my Laredo wife drives me locoed; it's by reelatin' things of which she's ignorant complete. Which if that lady only confines herse'f to facts them times, I'd have done stayed an' give her a battle; but the gent don't live who's able to keep his feet ag'in torrents of invidious fiction.

That's where my former he'pmeet puts me on the run. I freely confesses that, whenever she starts exercisin' her fancy an' her tongue at one an' the same time, I begins hittin' the high places in the scenery, plenty frantic, in efforts at a get-away.'

"Speakin' of Cherokee possessin' the deep-sea wisdom of a cinnamon b'ar that a-way, why he'll even tackle religion, get him started once. It's what he tosses off all casyooal one evenin', that more or less serves in framin' up what you-all might call my theeol'gy. Peets is sayin' that, while he's eager to accept the idee of a footure life, his argyooment breaks down every time he seeks to convince himse'f tharof.

"'I don't seem to connect none,' says Peets; 'an' so, while sech theeries don't make no hit with me, I'm constrained to regyard Boot Hill as the final finish.'

"It's yere Cherokee sets in a reemonstrative stack. 'Doc,' says he, 'that's because you faces the wrong way. Now, startin' from the ondeniable fact that you're livin' a whole lot, instead of tryin' to prove thar is a yereafter, s'ppose you tries to prove thar ain't. It's my notion you'll find yourse'f more up ag'inst it even than you are before.' Then, appearin' like he's some ashamed, an' turnin' to Nell—who's keepin' tabs, as well as lookin' out the deal—he shifts the subject by askin', 'Whatever does that last jack do?' "

CHAPTER IV

THE LOOKING OUT OF FARO NELL

FARO NELL'S full partner with Cherokee in his bank, an' he not only believes in her jedgment but in her luck. Let the game go rompin' along ag'inst him for three or four deals, an' he never fails to call Nell in behind the box. Likewise, the change is freequent ben'ficial. Many a time an' oft she brings home to the checkrack them hundreds Cherokee's lost out. Yoosual, however, he does the dealin', while Nell holds down her offishul p'sition on the lookout stool.

"Cherokee sets a heap of store by little Nell. Nothin' 'll cloud him up so quick as ontoward or sultry utterances where she is. Nacherally, no se'f respectin' gent'll say what shocks a lady, an' the lady thar. Shorely, no one who's a citizen of Wolfville in good standin', 'll go lettin' his conversation get stampeded that a-way, no matter what's took place. With chance-blown sports, the case is sometimes otherwise. But they soon learns from the way Cherokee looks as well as what he does—for from time to time he's forced to buffalo a few—that, with Nell in the picture, it's a heap discreet to do their talkin' with the hobbles on. Not that these yere reestrictions works a hardship neither. In emergencies thar's still the street, an' any gent whose fate is more'n he can b'ar is free to go outside an' cuss.

"For myse'f, I attaches no valyoo to that street franchise, bein' ag'in bad language at all times, whatever the indoocements. Profanity is never a advantage, an' sometimes works a loss; which last is shown in the business of the English Dooke. It's the verbal short-comin's of that peer which sets Nell's s'picions to millin'. Cherokee? He's no more expectin' that titled Briton to turn himse'f loose fraudyoolent, than for Black Jack to ask a blessin' or break forth into the doxology. Also, the affair's a heap to Nell's credit; an' it shows that, when she's lookin' out, she's a adjunct not wisely to be deespised.

"Old Monte brings news of that patrician first. 'An' that nobleman,' says he, 'is threatenin' Wolfville with a call. He's pesterin' about Tucson now; an', you hear your Uncle Monte! what he's doin' to farobank in that meetrop'lis would fill a book! Dookes, that a-way, is certainly high-rollers.'

"The Dooke it looks like exhausts Tucson, an' then he comes bulgin' into Wolfville per schedyool. Thar bein' no reason in partic'lar to have it in for dookes, the camp meets him plenty cordial. Enright an' Peets both drinks with him, an' tells him to browse 'round in the same onmuzzled way he would in England.

"In the beginnin', the Dooke gives himse'f up to askin' questions concernin' the 'Resources of Arizona.' An' you can gamble he don't ask in vain. Which if he keeps tabs on them 'Resources,' as Texas an' Boggs an' Tutt enoomerates the same, the complete round-up's shore calk'lated to make him dizzy. Accordin' to them statis-

ticians, Arizona, as a land flowin' with milk an' honey, has Canaan backed plumb off the map. Canaan ain't got a look-in! The Dooke, however, lets on he likes it, an' goes rummagin' about, buyin' licker an' droppin' 'Hs,' an' all mighty aff'ble an' permiscus.

"He's a big, good-lookin' sport, the Dooke is; an' among other *impedimenta*, as the Mexicans say, he's got a valet. Whatever a gent needs of a valet in a cow country is too many for me, but the camp figgers it's a way dookes has, an' lets it go at that. This yere valet puts in his servile time standin' 'round, an' never opens his clamshell. In case the Dooke makes signals, however, he jumps to the fervent front like a jack-rabbit.

"It's the second afternoon when the Dooke decides to give Cherokee's game a whirl. He don't make no bones about it, but pulls up a cha'r as condescendin' as any other hoss thief, buys a couple of stacks of reds, an' stands blandly in. Nothin' much happens for meb-by it's a hour. The luck swings to an' fro, like the pendyoolum of one of these yere Dutch clocks; now the Dooke's ahead, now he's behind, but on the whole he's loser.

"Through divers an' sundry vicissitoods, the Dooke keeps his temper, an' it ain't ontil his swell bet's swept in his language begins to get hectic. He's in for the limit, two hundred simoleons, on the big squar', coppered. The king falls to win, an' nacherally the specyoolation goes ag'inst him. Wharat the Dooke onburdens in a mouthful of mighty dire oaths.

"Cherokee halts the deal, his thumb on the face of the winnin' king.

"'Excoose me,' says Cherokee, eyein' the Dooke a heap icy an' implac'ble. 'Let me remark in passin' that, while I don't aim to lay down no lingual rooles for the British nobility, if you-all is ag'in guilty of sech oral malefactions in the presence of this yere young lady, you'll get all kyarved up. The last offender has to sw'ar in his vote 'lection day, his feachures bein' altered to that degree he loses his identity. He looks so plumb strange an' new that even his acquaintances don't know him none.'

"The Dooke breaks into profoose 'pologies. His feelin's, he explains, gets their bridle off inadvertent, an' it ain't goin' to happen no more.

"'Pon me word, it woan't!' says the Dooke.

"'All right!' returns Cherokee, proceedin' with the turn. 'Which I'd have sliced you into half-apples at once, only I remembers how you're English, an' a Dooke besides, an' makes allowances for a nacheral ignorance. But don't do it no more. Seven lose, nine win!'

"The Dooke keeps on goin' behind, an' when the next deal's down to the turn his last red chip finds its way back into the rack.

"'James,' says he, motionin' to his valet who's hoverin' in the background, 'give me me check-book.'

"The valet capers for'ard with the check-book, an' one of them new-fangled pens which has ink up its sleeve. The Dooke gets busy an' indites a check. He pauses

about the middle, an' remarks to Cherokee in that tired way which is the indoobitable mark of bloo blood, 'Me dear sir, this game is trivial to the verge of fatiguin'. Would you mind advauncin' the limit to a thousand on doubles an' five hundred on a case? Reelly, I don't know but I might take some interest in it then.'

"'No sech appeal,' replies Cherokee, 'is ever made to me in vain. In order that Wolfville may seem in all respecks like London to you, I yereby authorizes you to bet 'em higher'n a cat's back.'

"'Thanks, aw'fly!' says the Dooke.

"The Dooke signs the check, an' starts to pass it over to Cherokee. Then he draws it back.

"'No,' says he, smilin' like a p'lite bob-cat, 'it would be too presumptuous to ask a stranger to accept me signachoor for so large a sum. This is for one thousand pounds—I should say five thousand dollars; I'll send it down to the express company.' Then to the valet:—'James, take this to the Wells-Fargo office. They've had instructions, an' will give you gold for it.'

"The valet bows to the floor as he ropes onto the check. 'Very good, sir!' he says, an' ambles off.

"'An' now,' observes the Dooke to Cherokee, 'if you'll be so kind as to oblige me with five thousand dollars in chips, pendin' me valet's return, I think we may continyoo. The cash to pay for them will be here presently—not a doubt of it! Or, if by any accident—an' that's hardly to be thought of as possible—a mistake has occurred in the express company's instructions, an' the check is not honored, the play need bind no one.

Win or lose, it's onderstood that onless James returns with the five thousand, the play don't go.'

"Cherokee never dreams of hesitatin', but shoves over five thousand in yellow chips—a hundred dollars a chip. The Dooke sweeps 'em towards him, an' the deal begins.

"It's yere an' now that luck shifts; the Dooke commences to win. He's pilin' up the yellow boys in stacks of ten, too—a cool thousand on a kyard! Likewise, since he's placin' each bet so it's down four ways at once, he's gettin' veheement action. Everything's the Dooke's like a avalanche, an' by the time the deal's half out, he's ten thousand to the good an' still a-goin'. Also, he ain't so thoroughbred but what his eyes is blazin' with avarice. Cherokee's face is as deevoid of expression as the wrong side of a tombstone. The deal goes on, the stream of the Dooke's winnin's flowin' in onchecked.

"When that valet goes weavin' off to the Wells-Fargo folks, packin' the Dooke's five thousand-dollar check, Nell slides off her perch, an' motions Boggs to take her place. No one minds; she does the same thing often when she's tired. The deal proceeds, Boggs actin' as lookout, an' Nell sa'nters forth into the street.

"The Wells-Fargo office is at the far end of camp, an' onless the valet's a antelope it'll be twenty minutes before he's doo to show up. The Dooke's skirmishin' with his eye watchin', an', when at last he does get back, sees him the moment he steps in the door. Black Jack, who's faced so he can tell, avers that the Dooke signs up to the valet with a pecooliar wink, an' that tharupon the valet,

like the wink means the Dooke's on knee-deep velvet that a-way, pulls a roll of money from his jeans.

"'I beg pardon, sir,' says the valet; 'ere's the money, sir. They didn't 'ave the gold, sir; I 'opes the bills 'll do.'

"'Certainly!' says the Dooke, takin' the roll plenty lofty; 'bills or gold, it's all the same.'

"The Dooke runs through the bundle—ten five-hundred-dollar notes, an' passes it over to Cherokee.

"'That makes good,' says he.

"'Not yet it don't!'

"It's Nell who interferes—Nell who, comin' in on the heels of the valet, now rounds herse'f up at Cherokee's shoulder. As she takes charge of the sityooation, she pushes the money back to the Dooke.

"'Beg pardon, Miss!' observes the Dooke; an', for all his bluff front, a frightened look drifts across his face. 'Beg pardon; but I reely don't onderstand!'

"'You don't?' repeats Nell, her eye some scornful. Then to Cherokee: 'That tin-horn bandit of a valet never offers no check to the Wells-Fargo folks. He goes to the office, an' asks a fool question or two; but, so far from cashin' any check, that worthless docyooment's in his clothes right now. I'll bet a new bunnet this titled horned-toad ain't got a *centouse* with the express people. He's been handin' you an' me the old-thing.'

"'Oh, I see!' says Cherokee, an' the glance he bestows upon the Dooke is the kind that frequent ushers in a fooneral. 'The notion ain't so bad, neither! This yere noble hold-up writes a no-account check, an' sends it out by his partner; who strolls about, goes as far as the express

offices for the looks of the thing an' to kill time proper, an' returns. An' the idee's this: If you wins'—turnin' to the Dooke direct—'you gives him the office, an' he reports the check cashed. If you're behind, you signs him up to that effect. Perceivin' which, he's sorry, but is obleeged to say the express people ain't received no instructions none as yet, an' turns the check down. Thar bein' no money forth-comin', accordin' to the onderstandin' win or lose, the play don't go. It's a beautiful scheme—a scheme where my only chance is to lose, an' your only chance is to win!'

"'Me dear sir,' chatters the Dooke, 'this is Greek to me! I don't onderstand it at all! James!'

"Thar's no 'James'; the valet's faded.

"'An' shows his sense!' remarks Boggs.

"'You don't savey?' repeats Cherokee. 'All you needs is a five thousand dollar roll, a English accent, a imitation valet, an' a blinded come-on like me, an' your fortune's made! I've been imposed upon a heap of ways, but this yere wrinkle's new complete. Come; set in those chips! While you can't have my money, as a lesson to myse'f, seein' how close you comes to landin' me, I'm goin' to let you deepart with the honors of war—your life and your bank-roll.'

"Cherokee counts the Dooke's chips back into the check-rack, an the count shows he has the game beat for clost onto fifteen thousand dollars.

"'You come mighty near makin' a killin', Dooke!' remarks Boggs, who's listenin' an' lookin' on a heap interested.

"The Dooke is murmurin' onder his breath about how he 'don't onderstand,' when Cherokee cuts him short.

"'Yere!' exclaims Cherokee; 'go with Jack Moore to the Wells-Fargo people; an', if they cashes your check, I'll make good this yere fifteen thousand dollars worth of chips twice over. But thar's this proviso: If the Wells-Fargoes don't come down, you'll shore find someone shootin' at you with two guns at once.'

"Not bein' locoed, the Dooke don't take Cherokee's proffer, but makes a gesture like he's the victim of misonderstandin's.

"'You better hit the trail a lot!' says Enright to the Dooke, as that member of the House of Lords hesitates about the Red Light door. 'For while this yere's a idle sort o' afternoon, an' I don't feel much like goin' through the labors of a lynchin', the idee of swingin' off a nobleman is far from bein' reepellant. It's my opinion, should some member of the stranglers make a motion to that effect, it'd carry yoonanimous. As I su'gests, Dooke, you'd better hit the trail!'

"'An' havin' hit it, don't stop goin', neither!' warns Jack Moore. 'Keep forgin' right ahead ontil you're miles beyond the confines of this camp. The game law's out on dookes, an' if you stays loiterin' round, some gent who's makin' a collection'll take to bombardin' you up by way of addin' you to his mooseyum.'

"'But where can I go?' pleads the Dooke, castin' a despairin' glance about, like he's seekin' to locate that vanished valet.

"'Go to Red Dog,' breaks in Boggs; 'they'll be tickled to death to see you over thar. If you beats that gang of drunkards out of anything, you can keep it. However, I don't much reckon you will, for as shore-thing artists they're cap'ble of goin' some themselves. Also, if you starts anything, an' them veterans in crime ketches you at it, you're a gone fawnskin. Them Red Dog outcasts ain't so leenient as Cherokee yere.'

"'However do you come to think of it, Nell?' asks Cherokee later. 'That wily stranger, with his little check book, would have got by me like runnin' water!'

"'In my experience,' returns Nell, with the air of bein' a hundred years old, 'bad checks an' bad manners goes hand in hand. I knows what I thinks of this yere Dooke's language, an' it strikes me I'll trail out after that valet an' see what the express people thinks of his signachoor.'

"'Well,' says Cherokee, snappin' the deck in the box for another deal, 'I ain't as a roole in favor of encouragin' habits of s'picion in the very young; but in the present instance, Nell, since it leaves you an' me them sev'ral thousand kopecs to the good, it would shore seem far-fetched in me to go formyoolatin' any reproofs. In short, I regyards it rather as a season for congratyoolations; in which sperit I yereby apprises our honored bar-keep that the camp's honin' to yoonite in a libation to your health. Jack,' concloods Cherokee, motionin' to Black Jack, 'as the Ganymede of the establishment the rest reemains with you.'"

CHAPTER V

THE OFF-WHEELER OFFENDS

"SPEAKIN' of Cherokee holdin' them views as to a footure life," observed the Old Cattleman, feeling for the lemon peel in his glass, "I'm bound to say that personal I ain't religious none; leastwise in the church sense, ownin' no talents tharfor. Also, as a roole, I prefers doin' good to doin' right. The gent who does right is thinkin' of himse'f; the gent who does good is thinkin' of others—which is a heap better for hoomanity. No, I'm not religious; an' yet, if ever I'm inclined to doubt the eff'cacy of religion, them changes wrought in the Off-Wheeler makes said doubts reedic'lous.

"Is Wolfville religious? you asks. While its religious feelin' is some latent, you can bet your pony an' throw the saddle in, Wolfville is a Christain commoonity. I makes this announcement confident; because, when a obtroosive proflagate comes weavin' over from Red Dog, allowin' he's a atheist, Boggs is thar with all four hoofs to call his bluff.

"We're playin' poker at the time, Boggs jugglin' the deck. 'An' so,' says Boggs, pausin' in mid-deal, as this pagan person decl'res himse'f as sech, 'you're one of them cunnin' tarrapins who don't believe in nothin'?'

"'That's whatever!' retorts the Red Dog pagan,

mighty sprightly. 'Go on with the deal; I ain't got but three kyards.'

"'The same bein' all you're goin' to get,' returns Boggs, tossin' the deck onto the table an' shovin' back his cha'r. 'Do you-all reckon I'd set across from an outcast who denies the trooths of Holy Writ? Not if I holds four kings an' a ace perpetyooal.'

"The balance of the outfit follows Boggs' smoke; Cherokee Hall bars the onbeliever at faro-bank, the Red Light refooses him licker, an' Missis Rucker gives it out cold that, if she only receives word in time, she'd have shore pinched down on his grub. In less space then it takes to rope an' hawgtie a steer, he's 'ostracised,' as Doc Peets calls it. Which that ostracism works, too; an' it so deepresses the Red Dog pagan that, next mornin' at sun-up, he pulls his subdooed an' ondeemonstrative freight. Shore, he goes back to Red Dog; where, surrounded by that passel of Ishmaels which is its citizens, he ondoubted feels as much at home as a drunkard at a barbecue.

"It's as well he makes that get-away plenty prompt; for the idee of him bein' a atheist, gets so proned into Boggs that, by third drink time, the sight of him would have brought on a religious war. Boggs goes so far as to tell Old Man Enright, that, in his pore, sinful estimation, it's our dooty as a camp to paint up for a croosade ag'in Red Dog, her harborin' sech heathen. Enright, however, allows they're protected by the constitootion, an' so Boggs simmers down.

"An' I'm yere to remark that the subsequent doin's

of this pagan person jestifies the elevation of Wolfville's attitoode. It ain't more'n months when he sticks up the stage over by the Whetstone Springs, an' prounces on the mail-bag an' the Wells-Fargo box felonious.

"'You-all takes it from me,' says Boggs, when he's told of the coach bein' rustled, 'them atheists is all hold-ups in their hearts. Which they'd every man jack of 'em be out workin' the trails right now, only thar ain't mail-bags an' express boxes to go 'round.'

"From the stand we takes in the case of this yere Red Dog pagan, you-all sees that, onderneath the surface like a streak of ore, Wolfville is rich in religious feelin'. It's dormant, merely, because none of them evangelical engineers has come pirootin' along, to sink a shaft an' work it.

"For one brief moment, an' one only, is the gospel torch set blazin' in our midst. An' of all folks, it's the Off-Wheeler who lights it up! That it's him proves as amazin' as a cow on a front porch. Doc Peets himse'f speaks of it as a 'pheenomenon:' an' when it comes to readin' the brands on a pheenomenon, an' readin' 'em right, I'll back Peets ag'in entire Arizona. I've said freequent that he's the best eddicated scientist in the Territory, an' I only desires to add at this eepock that the statement goes for the limit, with any gent who feels inclined.

"This yere Off-Wheeler has been hankerin' 'round Wolfville, mebby it's six months, before he takes to jumpin' sideways religious that a-way. His days is spent vibratin' between the Red Light an' the O. K.

Restauraw, with now an' then a evenin' at the dance hall. Not that he ever shakes a festive laig at the latter 'Temple of Harmonious Mirth,' as Hamilton is fond of callin' the same; not that he becomes gala in any polkas, or waxes circooitous in any walses, or loosens the floor boards in any quadrilles. Is he too old? I don't reckon now he's overtook thirty years as yet; but, commonly, he's too seedate to dance, which is to say he's too drunk. Inebriated gents is plenty out o' place in a quadrille, though some of 'em frequent holds contrary views. As to the Off-Wheeler; he never falls into no sech error. His licker, instead of renderin' him vivacious, sort o' bogs him down; realizin' which, he ain't that fool-minded as to go lapsin' into the dizzy whirl as a performer.

"It's from Black Jack, with whom he's more or less free across the Red Light counter, that I gleans what little I saveys concernin' the Off-Wheeler. It looks like his folks don't want him East none; an', I must say, no gent who makes a study of the quantity of Old Jordan he consoomes, is obleeged to ask the reasons why. Old Monte, for years, is the offishul drunkard of Wolfville; an' yet that Off-Wheeler boy comes rollickin' along, an' wrests the bacchanalian laurels from Old Monte's brow, as easy as if that dipsomaniac has only learned the taste of licker yesterday!

"Of course, the latter sot is thar with his yoosual excuses, an' p'ints out that his deebauches is necessarily interrupted, him havin' to sober up s'fficient to take out the stage. The Off-Wheeler, he says, with no stage to drive, an' no mail-bag an' express box reespons'bilities,

has the advantage. Still it's the expert Wolfville view, beginnin' with Dave Tutt an' goin' to Enright, that with the stage coach left out entire Old Monte never stands a chance. That pore old profligate wouldn't be ace high ag'in the Off-Wheeler in nose-paint competitions. Which the Mohave desert is a swamp compared to the latter artist, he's that onslaked.

"While none of us deems ill of the Off-Wheeler," continued the old gentleman, pouring a reflective three fingers of his favorite refreshment, "the only party about the camp who reely loves him is Black Jack. The trooth is—him bein' commonly dulled by drink that a-way—none of the rest of us gets much acquainted with him. Also, from a bashful habit he deevelops, of hoppin' out the door every time a gent starts some triflin' gun-play, the belief gains ground that he's 'most too timid for Arizona. This nacherally don't he'p his standin' none, in a camp where the only aristocracy is the aristocracy of nerve.

"'The trouble with him, gents,' explains Jack, attemptin' the Off-Wheeler's rescoo as to that question of nerve, 'is he's gun-shy. It's because he's over-bred, him comin' from a bloo-blood family. You notices the same thing in dogs that's bred too fine.'

"None of us regyards this theery of Jack's as possessin' signif'cance, or provin' anything except he's so foolish fond of the Off-Wheeler it obscoores his jedgement.

"You see Jack has a moosical ear, an' the Off-Wheeler can shore sing a whole lot. It's his singin' which biases Jack. Evenin's, when trade is slack at the Red Light, Jack an' the Off-Wheeler frequent finds themselves

alone. Jack'll be lightin' up the karosene lamps, or mebby teeterin' 'round turnin' down them that smokes. Feelin' lonesome, he'll request the Off-Wheeler to sing *Home, Sweet Home.* Which that victim of rum never refooses, but, cl'arin' his valves with another hooker, allers cuts loose.

"The strange thing, considerin' how Jack himse'f goes honin' for said madrigal, is it's shore to make that drink-mixer weep. He's a mighty sentimental barkeep, Jack is, an', every time the Off-Wheeler hands him *Home, Sweet Home,* he shorely does shed tears profoose.

"An' yet I regyards them lamentations as to Jack's credit; the more, when I finds out he never has no home —as he, himse'f, confesses to me private. I'm sayin' how them childhood's scenes which surrounds his yooth must have been hotbeds of affectionate peace, to make him feel like he does.

"'That's it!' he returns, gulpin' down a sob, an' swabbin' off the bar hysterical; 'my yooth goes onnursed of any home outside a cow camp. Which is why I howls when I hears that ballad! You sports, who've had homes, of course don't mind.'

"It's in Tucson the Off-Wheeler is took religious that time; an' the very way he comes to shift his blankets to said meetropolis, looks of itse'f like the movin' of the hand of Providence. He slides over to Tucson by request of Hamilton, who is that maddened about business troubles —of which the Off-Wheeler is the onintentional bug onder the chip—he says he's afraid of what may ensoo if the Off-Wheeler stays in sight.

"'It's not, I confess, for me,' says Hamilton, 'to go forcin' a gent to migrate, wharfore I puts this on personal grounds entire. I reequests you, merely as gent to gent, to *vamos* for Tucson, ontil sech times as I gets my feelin's bedded down. It's odds on, if you-all remains where I can see you, an' me aggravated the way I be, it'll bring on 'motional insanity, onder the inflooence of which I'll jest about shoot you up a lot. Tharfore, I begs as a favor that you jump over to Tucson, ontil my wounds is healed an' this yere fit wears off.'

"No one blames Hamilton partic'lar for makin' these su'gestions, for he's shore suffered a heap. Besides, he's by nacher as nervous a party as Boggs, an' as much a slave to the emotions. On the other hand, we don't exactly go trackin' 'round condemnin' the Off-Wheeler neither. It's askin' too much of a gent, an' him a tenderfoot, to expect him to stay planted where most likely he'll get all shot up, over issues wharin he has no interest.

"At that, as Texas Thompson, who sort o' leans to the Hamilton side, says, thar's right ways an' wrong ways to go eelim'natin' of yourse'f from other gents' wars; an', when the Off-Wheeler, in gettin' out from between Doc Holiday—who's payin' us a friendly visit—an' an offensive sport from Prescott, almost t'ars the side out o' the dance hall, he somewhat oversteps.

"Whatever is the trouble? It's this a-way: It begins by the Prescott party, in a mood of roode exyooberance, tanglin' up his spurs in the trooseau of Holiday's partner, who's floatin' by in a Pocatello reel. Holiday, with that, starts in to teach the Prescott party what's due a lady

with his six-shooter. Shore; Holiday is right! The first dooty of a gent is to rebooke vulgarity.

"Now the Off-Wheeler, inadvertent, is in the line of fire; an', when the lead begins to sing, he takes it on the run. But he don't make for the front door—which is the public's; he heads for the orchestra's private door.

"Moosicians in Arizona is some sparse. The Dutchman with the big fiddle, Hamilton freights in from twelve hundred miles away, an' pays five hundred dollars for. In a sperit of proodence, Hamilton plants his high-priced troobadours by a side door, so they can skip out safe in case of gun-playin' an' war-dancin' on the floor. His arrangements would have been perfect, only it befalls that when Holiday an' the Prescott boor hooks up, the Off-Wheeler, in his frenzied rush for the orchestra's private door, mounts an' walks down the virchuoso with the big fiddle, an' leaves 'em both a wreck. That invalyooable big fiddle is redooced to toothpicks! No wonder it locoes Hamilton!

"'It's not the Dutchman I bewails,' says Hamilton, 'but wherever am I to get another doghouse voylin?'

"While the Off-Wheeler comes in for a modicum of disrepoote because of this eepisode, opinion as stated don't all run one way. The day the Off-Wheeler leaves, as Texas Thompson goes to criticisin' him over the layout to Cherokee, Faro Nell, who's on the lookout stool where she belongs, cuts in for the Off-Wheeler.

" 'Which I don't think,' says Nell, takin' the words out o' Cherokee's mouth, 'that that Off-Wheeler boy is none to blame. The Prescott person is actin' like he's

out to down everybody in the room—he's shootin' so difoose. Jim Hamilton's no business to go to ghost-dancin'.'

"'Straighten up them chips on the eight,' observes Cherokee, across to Texas.

"Cherokee aims to change the subject, but Nell don't heed him more'n if he's the wind that blows.

"'You bet, I'll shore tell Jim Hamilton what I thinks,' she goes on, pickin' up a stack Texas has jest lost on the trey; 'an' so'll Missis Rucker. The idee of him trackin' 'round permiscus, about a measly old fiddle!'

"Texas an' Cherokee says nothin'; it ain't lucky to go contradictin' Nell.

"The Off-Wheeler's been in Tucson two weeks, an' none of us is thinkin' of him partic'lar, when of a sudden Old Monte brings the word. Which we-all sees thar's something in the wind, long before the stage reaches town, from the fuss the old reprobate is raisin'. He's pourin' the leather into the six horses, an' sendin' 'em to beat four of a kind.

"'Mebby it's a lady,' says Boggs, watchin' the nearin' dust-cloud, an' givin' a extra cock to his Chihuahua hat. 'That bond slave of alcohol allers keeps his team up ag'inst the bit, when thar's a lady aboard.'

"But it ain't no lady; thar's nobody in the stage save sev'ral pale he-towerists, who seems pleased to get shet of sech drivin'.

"It's in the Red Light, where he goes to rinse the thirst out o' his mouth, Old Monte onfurls what's happened.

Also, he's most onfeelin' slow gettin' started. Now he's with us, his headlong dust-raisin' haste disappears; he measures out his forty drops that deeliberate, thar ain't one of us don't eetch to beat in his head with a gun. Boggs, who's as inquisitive as a pet b'ar, at last can no longer reestrain his cur'osity.

"'Smoke up thar, you old prairie dog!' he roars. 'Is it a killin'? Does any of them Tucson horned toads get beefed?'

"'Beefed?' repeats Old Monte, contempchoous, settin' down his glass; 'it's a mighty sight awfuller than that! The Off-Wheeler's j'ined the church.'

"'What!' shouts Boggs.

"'Moreover,' goes on Old Monte, after the information trickles into us, 'he's plottin' to come down on this devoted outfit all spraddled out, my next trip back from Tucson, an' preach a heap. He allows he'll show us our sins as in a lookin'-glass; which them's his words, gents! "Wolfville experiences me at my worst; she shall now behold me at my best!" says he.'

"'So he's goin' to preach!' exclaims Texas Thompson. 'Well, if that don't beat a royal flush! Whatever is this yere Off-Wheeler party thinkin' of? Does he reckon he's goin' to tree the camp in this onlicensed manner, an' go promulgatin' doctrines?'

"'An' why not?' demands Boggs, who's pleased by excitement. 'Ain't the Off-Wheeler a free immoral agent? Which if this sheep that was lost an' is found ag'in—as parson Cartwright back in Missouri used to say—desires to be heard theological, it's up to us, in-

stead of obstructin' the play, to sort o' cosset it along. I'm yere to say I'm with him for them services.'

"It's mighty likely Texas would have locked horns with Boggs; but seein' that Enright an' Peets, with Dave Tutt trailin', expresses themselves sim'lar he waives it.

"Black Jack, when he hears, is that delighted he forgets his dooties as barkeep. Bein' reeproved by Peets, he slams all his bottles on the bar, utterly reckless

"'It's on the house, gents!' he says. 'He'p yourselves hearty! Which I knowed the Off-Wheeler would make you-all coyotes set up, once he struck his gait!'

"Old Monte, who don't propose to get lost in the shuffle, takes up in deetail how the Off-Wheeler becomes religious.

"'This is how it falls in, gents,' he explains. 'Thar's a gospel sharp got a tent over thar, an' the way he's holdin' forth is shore prodigious. Not that I goes maraudin' 'round his game none myse'f, fearin' he might get his runnin' iron onto me. Religion is ondoubted all right; but it wouldn't blend happ'ly with stage drivin'. Bein' younger, an' I might add drunker, this Off-Wheeler ain't so discreet as me; an' he takes to idlin' 'round the meetin's, till, bang! one evenin' when he's off his gyard, he's roped an' throwed an' branded into life everlastin' like crackin' off a Colt's-45.'

"'Does he tell you this himse'f?' asks Enright.

"'It's the barkeep at the Oriental. He puts it up I ought to ride over to that gospel herd, an' cut the Off-Wheeler out a lot. I'm yere to say I don't see eevents in that light. Some of the biggest hostiles in Tucson

is at them meetin's on their knees, an' at the least sign of me tamperin' with the Off-Wheeler, or tryin' to snake the game, they'd have took enough of my ha'r to stuff a cushion for the pulpit.'

"'Still, you converses with the Off-Wheeler?' interrogates Peets.

"'Nothin' shorer!' says Old Monte. 'But, say! I can tell they has him cinched with the first word! He does all the talkin', calls me a lost soul personal, gives it out that he himse'f is a brand snatched from the burnin', an' final defies every gent, not of his way of thinkin', as a emissary of evil. Seein' he's plumb beyond control, I goes to the diskyard. Reply was useless, gents,' continyoos Old Monte, thinkin' mebby he needs defence. 'It would have been like talkin' to a sand storm—the Off-Wheeler's took that bad! Besides he ain't so tame as he was. His air is grown brash an' cocky; an' he might resent me tryin' to play his hand. Which I've seen these yere reevivals in the states; an' thar's no foretellin' what a gent will do, once he's filled with grace.'

"'Whatever,' says Dave Tutt, speakin' gen'ral, 'do you reckon this Off-Wheeler strikes when he goes glancin' off into religion this a-way?'

"'Mebby,' observes Boggs, 'it's the change of licker. That Tucson nose-paint would make a jackrabbit insult a coyote to his face.'

"'That's not it!' says Old Monte, emphatic; 'the Off-Wheeler's as cold sober as a fish.'

"'Wouldn't that of itse'f explain it?' asks Texas Thompson, appealin' to Peets in his role of scientist.

'Don't you figger, Doc, that stoppin' his Old Jordan on-balances his mind?'

"Peets snaps his fingers at sech surmises, as much too farfetched. In the end we-all settles down to wait; by what Old Monte says, the Off-Wheeler's due to come prancin' along *poco tiempo*, an' then the myst'ry envelopin' his doin's should begin to cl'ar up."

CHAPTER VI

WOLFVILLE'S REVIVAL

DURIN' the three days prior to the Off-Wheeler showin' up, the camp don't talk of nothin' else. He supplants faro-bank an' yoosurps whiskey in the public mind. Enright an' Peets allows that his holdin' services is a good scheme, as calk'lated to give 'em a splendid impression of us East.

"'Besides,' adds Enright, 'thar's a roomer that Red Dog is out to build a chapel. This'll show how, in matters churchly as in all things else, Wolfville has simply got that low-flung hamlet beat both ways from the jack.'

"When the day arrives, Boggs hints 'round that a healthy notion would be to saddle up, an' meet the Off-Wheeler with a friendly foosilade from our guns, by way of welcome. Enright shakes his head.

"'It might give the boy a skeer,' he says, 'an' stampede him to the p'int where he abandons his idee of preachin'. It's better to let him hit camp, as though his gettin' religion's as commonplace as ground-owls.'

"Nacherally we takes our hunch from Enright, an' when the stage pulls up at the post-office, an' the Off-Wheeler eemerges tharfrom, we confines our demonstrations to sayin' 'Howdy!' He says 'Howdy!' back, an' heads for Missis Rucker's.

"Presently Rucker comes across to say the Off-Wheeler wants to see Enright. Then Jack Moore is sent for; an' a little later Jack tacks up a notice in the Red Light, settin' forth thar'll be church next day at two P. M.

"'That's the talk!' cries Black Jack, readin' the notice aloud, some enthoosiastic. 'The Off-Wheeler's no slouch! He's a wolf, an' it's his night to howl!'

"When Enright rej'ines us, he's smilin' wide an' bland. 'Nothin' could be more sincere than that yooth,' he announces. 'I asks him whatever is his little game. He explains that, after holdin' church among us this time, he's goin' chargin' back to the States to study preachin' as a reg'lar play, an' get himse'f ordained a shore-enough divine. After which he figgers on settlin' down among us, an' ridin' herd on our souls. Of course I tells him that what he plans is bound to do him proud; an' that Wolfville will be ever thar, for its bank roll, to back his game.'

"Hearin' of the comin' meetin', the controllin' inflooence of the Bird Cage Op'ry House offers that edifice. Enright, who's took to managin' for the Off-Wheeler, deeclines with thanks. He lets on that the warehouse, belongin' to the New York Store, will do better.

"'It's smaller, an' tharfore cosier,' says Enright.

"Boggs an' Black Jack now takes hold strong. They rolls in a drygoods box, an' spreads a red Navajo blanket over it—the same makin' a gorgeous pulpit. They totes cha'rs from the O. K. Restauraw ontil you can't rest. As a final break they packs over the pianny from the dance hall—Hamilton, who's gone into the racket to

the saddle girths, he'pin'. After that they rests from their labors.

"Texas Thompson evinces surprise at Hamilton fomentin' this preachin', an' him wantin' to go gunnin' for the Off-Wheeler, not three weeks before.

"'You see,' says Hamilton, in explanation, 'it's me chasin' him out o' town, that a-way, which now impels me to give him a boost. I'm preyed on by the feelin' that I'm onjest to the Off-Wheeler. As makin' amends, I turns in with moosicians an' pianny an' cha'rs, an' strives to rib up these yere services, so's the same'll be a howlin' vict'ry. Even if the Off-Wheeler does trompple down my priceless dog-house voylin, I'm no gent to b'ar malice; an' I acts accordin'!'

"For one hour before the services begins, Black Jack an' Hamilton shets off on the sale of snake-jooce at the Red Light an' the dance hall bars. It's Hamilton who proposes, temp'rarily, to thus close down these emporiyums, Jack at the go-off hesitatin'.

"'Not from no low lust of gain,' says Jack; 'but I ain't none certain a few fingers of Old Jordan, distributed round in the flock, won't make it easier for the Off-Wheeler. It might render 'em soft an' good-nachered, an' not so prone to plant their moccasins an' hold back.'

"Hamilton possesses contrary beliefs. 'Let's send the outfit in on a cold collar,' urges Hamilton. 'Then they can protect themselves; an' afterward, if any of 'em is took religious, they can't blame no one but themselves. Moreover, they won't be so apt to backslide. It's safer for the repyootation of the Off-Wheeler as a

divine. It might be remembered ag'in him invidious, if he brings some party to his knees, an' later that convert goes romancin' off ag'in to eat sinful husks an' draff with the swine.'

"Jack is so carried off his feet by this, he not only coincides yoonanimous, but declar's on the quiet to Dave Tutt that thar's depths in Hamilton's intellects hitherto onfathomed.

"At church time Boggs app'ints himse'f corral boss, an' shows the folks their seats. Wolfville's best element turns out in a body. Tucson Jennie, with her infant Enright Peets Tutt, has a front cha'r by the side of Dave; Missis Rucker, bringin' Rucker—the latter lookin' subdooed, but sore about bein' snatched from his refutch among the Apaches—is present; while scattered yere an' thar is Cherokee, an' Faro Nell, an' Texas Thompson, an' the rest. Black Jack an' Hamilton, actin' as look-outs an' case-keepers to Boggs reespective, takes seats in the r'ar.

"When everything is lined up, the Off-Wheeler, packin' a giant Bible onder his arm, shows in the door. Followed by Enright an' Peets, he p'rades up the middle aisle an' goes into camp, all dignified, back of the dry-goods box pulpit with its Navajo blanket cover. He deeposits the scriptures in the middle of the red blanket an' then turns to Enright.

"Nacherally, while these yere various an' sundry steps is bein' took, we sizes up the Off-Wheeler. He shore does appear reegenerated a whole lot, though most likely a heap of that arises from gettin' the whiskey out

o' him. All the same he wears a game, noble look, as though them draughts of troo religion has been like the milk of mountain lions to him.

"'When you all recalls what he was,' says Hamilton, leanin' over to whisper in my y'ear, 'an' then sees what he is, it jest does a sport good to look at him!'

"As the Off-Wheeler indulges in that preelim'nary glance at Enright, Wolfville's old warchief gets up. 'No one,' observes Enright, his eye rovin' mildly about the room, 'will misonderstand me bein' yere. Brother Hawkins, formerly an' fav'rably known among us as the Off-Wheeler, has asked me to preeside, an' I gladly yields; the more cheerful, since Brother Peets consents to support my ignorance by his urbane countenance an' sagacious counsel. Should I strike a quicksand crossin', an' seem at any time in peril of boggin' down, Brother Peets will be on hand to pull me through. These services'—yere Enright consults a kyard, whereon the rootine of the proceedin's has been framed up in the nacher of a programme—'will commence by that celebrated cantatrice, Sister Sophy Silverthorne of the Bird Cage Op'ry House, leadin' us in *Rock of Ages*.'

"As Enright resoomes his cha'r, the whole band of us—Hamilton's pianny player, seated at that instrooment, beatin' out the 'companyment—onder the lead of Miss Silverthorne, lifts up our voices in the hymn. Boggs throws his heart into it to that reesoundin' extent, that Red Dog sends over a rum-soaked miscreant to ask what's wrong. No; you can go your ultimate chip this insultin' emissary don't deevelop his real mission none.

He comes projectin' 'round the door towards the finish; but we never do know what brings him thar for over a month. Bogg's language is sech as to kill an acre of grass when he learns; but it's too late to get reesentful action.

"On the hocks of that *Rock of Ages* hymn, the Off-Wheeler announces he'll open the deal with pray'r. We sinks our heads a heap deevout, for we wants to show we're wise to the proper caper. The Off-Wheeler begins to pour forth. He prays for Wolfville, for Arizona, an' at last incloods mankind at large in his orisons. I never does behold a more creditable seige of the throne, since last I sees the Cumberland.

"Also, I holds now as I holds then that if the Off-Wheeler had stuck to glitterin' gen'ralities, the meetin' would have gone from soda to hock without a murmur of discord. Mind you, I don't say that even as the kyards come out o' the box, it ain't for the best.

"After exhaustin' the sityooation, along what Peets calls 'broader lines,' the Off-Wheeler begins petitionin' for people speshul. As a starter, he hurls himse'f loose for Hamilton; an' the way he lays open the shortcomin's of that onforchoonate gent is shore s'fficient to make a graven image ketch its breath. The Off-Wheeler never misses a trick. On he surges, t'arin' away at pore Hamilton without reference to the weave of the cloth.

"Although it's in the middle of the pray'r, where the current's swiftest an' the channel deepest, Hamilton struggles to his feet.

"'I rises to a question of privilege,' says Hamilton,

addressin' Enright, who's contemplatin' him mighty baleful.

"'Brother Hamilton will state his question of privilege,' responds Enright, beatin' on the pulpit with the butt of his sixshooter, him havin' no reg'lar gavel.

"'Which I objects,' says Hamilton, 'to statements concernin' myse'f personal, as calk'lated to queer me on high. They exceeds the limit; I asks the protection of the cha'r.'

"'The cha'r,' retorts Enright, 'passin' on Brother Hamilton's objections, over-rooles the same. Thar is no limit to pray'r. Every gent, addressin' the Infinite, does so with the bridle off.'

"'Let the cha'r b'ar with me for one further word,' returns Hamilton, turnin' sort o' ugly. 'I yields to the tyrannical dictum of the cha'r. At the same time I desires to state that, although I not only assists in promotin' this meetin', but appears yere in a lib'ral if not a contrite sperit, I shall now hold the Off-Wheeler responsible with a gun, as soon as the contreebution box is passed.'

"'The cha'r is obleeged,' observes Enright, speakin' haughty, 'to inform Brother Hamilton that the threats jest made is neither in good nor proodent taste. Brother Hamilton must realize that Brother Hawkins, otherwise the Off-Wheeler, is oncap'ble, as a member of the clergy, of callin' his wicked bluffs. Also, I promises the brother that if he onlimbers in any smoky plays, or takes to shootin' up our pastor in sinful manner an' form as by him set forth, the male part of the congregation will

deescend upon him like a tornado, me in the avengin' van. Brother Hawkins will resoome his appeals, onterrified of these menaces; leavin' Brother Hamilton to that repentance an' hoomility of heart, which I'm shore my words should prodooce.'

"It's then the onexpected happens; an' it goes a long ways toward promootin' confidence in the Off-Wheeler's ministrations. As Enright ceases, an' while Boggs an' Black Jack—snortin' challenges to Hamilton—are tryin' to cut in on the play, the Off-Wheeler demands to be heard.

"'Thankin' the cha'r,' says that amatoor clergyman, 'for its generous adherence to the good cause, I desires to submit that I freely recognizes the rights of Brother Hamilton, an' shall be pleased to make good my pulpit utterances in the carnal way he outlines. If the cha'r will pass me its gun, I not packin' sech hardware, holdin' it to be the trinketry of Loocifer, I shall hope to convince Brother Hamilton of the error of his ways. The congregation will take a recess of ten minutes. Meanwhile we will reepair to the street, where I trusts to settle this controversy to the glory of Zion.'

"'But do you-all reckon it looks well, in one whose mission is peace?' asks Enright, some scandalized.

"'Thar is script'ral preecedent;' declar's the Off-Wheeler. 'Have I not the example of Joshua, of David, of Saul?—all men of war! An' of Abner, who smote his enemy onder the fifth rib; an' of Peter, who struck off the y'ear? Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards! Also, fear not for the safety of your shepherd.

Brother Hamilton is some soon with a gun; but, behold, I rely on One that taketh the wise in their own craftiness —even upon Him that maketh the deep to boil like a pot!'

"As the congregation files out, Boggs pushes up to the Off-Wheeler. 'Mebby,' whispers Boggs, 'you'd better let me represent. Bein' inyoored to these shindigs, I most likely pulls off a finish more fav'rable to the cause.'

"'Nay,' returns the Off-Wheeler, who is all keyed up, 'I shall even rebooke this son of Jeshurun, who I perceive waxeth fat an' kicks! He is like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely! Yea, I shall show him how man's days are as grass!—as a flower of the field so he flourisheth!'

"Outside in the street, the Off-Wheeler an' Hamilton takes their distance, the congregation makin' a rank of admiration on the sidewalk. Enright gives the word by droppin' his sombrero. Hamilton shoots a little wide, while the Off-Wheeler gets Hamilton in the thick of the laig.

"'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacle, O Israel!' sings the Off-Wheeler, as he returns Enright his gun.

"We-all goes back to our seats in the sanctchooary, Enright preesidin' as before, an' the Off-Wheeler takes up his supplications where Hamilton interrupts.

"When the pray'r is done, Peets, with Boggs an' Black Jack, comes trailin' in from the O. K. House, to which hostelry they packs Hamilton, followin' the shootin'.

"'How is my injured parishoner?' asks the Off-Wheeler.

"'Speakin' as his medical adviser,' says Peets, 'I should say he'll be hobblin' about in less'n a week. Contin-yooin' as a fellow worker in the vineyard, I adds that I leaves him in a tem'perate an' eddifyin' frame. He asks me to say that he reckons you're right about the proper scope of pray'r.'

"'Brother Hamilton is a lib'ral soul!' says the Off-Wheeler, a heap pleased. 'Yea, I shall visit him! Per-adventure, I shall show him where it is written that the liberal soul shall be made fat!' Then, turnin' to us: 'Oh, my hearers, how good an' how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in yoonity!'

"The pianny—the hymn bein' given out—strikes up, Miss Silverthorne puts herself in the vocal lead, an' we-all goes riotin' off on *We're Goin' Home to Die no More*, Boggs distinguishin' himse'f as prior, his tones resemblin' a wronged buffalo bull's. After the song, the Off-Wheeler reads his text: 'Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim, better than the vintage of Abi-ezer?' Which the sermon is a jo-darter, Wolfville figgerin' as 'the vintage of Abi-ezer.'

"When the contreebution box is passed by Boggs, the same bein' Peet's hat, Hamilton, to show he's with us, sends over a 20-dollar gold piece.

"'This is strength made perfect in weakness!' cries the Off-Wheeler joobilantly, as Hamilton's donation comes jinglin' in. 'I have lighted a candle of under-standin' in his heart, which shall not be put out!'

"As the last note of the doxology is sung, we-all crowds for'ard to congratchoolate the Off-Wheeler.

"Enright is the first to take his hand. 'Which I talks for all,' observes Enright, speakin' so every one can hear, 'when I says that pluggin' Brother Hamilton is the most excellent element in the ceremonies. Nothin' could have happened better, nothin' gone half so far towards convincin' this commoonity of the genyooineness of your preachments. That little gun play falls in plumb right. When you return, the incident will make your callin' an' election shore. I shall yereafter think better of my six-shooter,'—drawin' the weepon, an' lookin' it over approvin'ly—'for its share in spreadin' gospel trooths, an' the part it plays in Brother Hamilton's conversion.'"

CHAPTER VII

BISMARK DUTCH

"WHICH Enright," remarked the old gentleman, blowing a judgmatical cloud, "bein' the controllin' inflooence of that engine of Wolfville joorisproodence, the stranglers, allers takes to himse'f the reespons'bility of lettin' Bismark Dutch go that time. Shore, no; that ain't the old cimarron's name, none whatever! We simply ups an' hails him as 'Bismark Dutch' by way of identification. 'Bismark' would have been s'fficient by itse'f, only thar's another shorthorn from the Rhine, over in Colton, who's called 'Bismark;' wharfore we-all affixes 'Dutch', in order, as Doc Peets says, 'to diff'rentiate.'

"After Bismark Dutch has done pulled his freight, Enright is accustomed now an' then to wax quer'lous about him with himse'f.

"'By every roole of right, Doc,' he'd say—for he levels these yere views at Peets—'by every roole of right, that Tootonic maverick's doo to be swung off. It's a lapse of jestice to let him go, an' shore shows I'm gettin' old. That I does it on account of his locoed girl, so far from excoosin' sech weakness, merely goes to prove I'm gettin' old speshul.'

"Gen'rally, we-all don't say nothin' in response,

Peets an' the rest of us holdin' private it's only Enright's affectations. Wolfville's old chief has his vanities, same as other gents, an' he likes to let on his bein' soft-hearted that a-way is a deefect.

"Not but what thar's limits, iron-bound an' onbreakable, which goes with Enright's moll'fications. If it's a lady, or a baby, or mebby some weak an' hopeless sport who's been settin' in hard luck, he's as soft an' easy as a goose-ha'r pillow. It's different a whole lot when some maraudin' form of murderer pulls off a killin' cold, an' mebby does it from the r'ar. Then he's that hard he'd cut glass.

"'It shows the diff'rence, Doc,' Enright'd go on, 'between a vig'lance committee an' a shore enough court. Now a court sticks to law, an' don't go pirootin' off to one side sympathetic. But a vig'lance committee, speshully when some of the members is gettin' on in years an' beginnin' to slip their grip, is plenty prone to let their hearts run off with their heads. An' so,' he'd conclood with a sigh, 'public int'rest goes ungyarded an' exact jestice gets the blind staggers.'

"'Oh, I don't know,' Peets'd say, expostchoolatin', at the same time winkin' at Boggs or Cherokee, to let 'em savey he's only carryin' on the conversation so's to give Enright's se'f approval a chance to relax 'round a little —'oh, I don't know, Sam! Lettin' a gent go onswung, by virchoo of his folks an' their feelin's, is a mighty reason'ble reason. You ups an' hangs a party! Next day, the play's the same to him as though it never comes off. Not so his folks. S'ppose he has a mother now?

Her pore old sens'bilities contínyoos sweatin' blood till the closin' of her days. Once a year, when the awful date comes round, it's all to go through ag'in for her. An' so, heart-broke an' stricken, she keeps bleedin' away her life. For which said causes, I holds vig'lance committees has got reg'lar triboonals beat to a stand-still, seein' they takes sech argyooments as that pore old mother into consid'ration.'

"Enright after listenin' to the above'd shake his head, like he's tryin' to feel resigned. Then he'd sigh ag'in plenty dolorous, an' say: 'Mebby you're right, Doc; mebby you're right!' an' all plumb broken-sperited. After which he'd brace up mighty fierce, an' turn on Black Jack with, 'Whatever do you reckon we're ha'ntin' about the Red Light for?'

"This yere'd close the talk on that p'int, an' as Black Jack, some conscience stricken, shoves up the bottles, we shifts to other topics.

"None of us ever gets to know much about Bismark Dutch; an' Who he is? an' What he is? an' Why he is? constitootes a list concernin' which Wolfville wrangles over unto this day. Boggs, the first flash out o' the box, allows he's a hermit. Wharupon, Tutt p'ints out pos'tive that he can't be no hermit, because his daughter's with him.

"'Hermits that a-way Dan,' declar's Tutt, 'never has no children an' always dwells alone. Which it's essenshul to hermits to dwell alone.' Followin' these yere announcements, Tutt promulgates a theory Bismark Dutch is a exile. 'Take my steer for it,' says he, 'they've

been layin' for him in the old country to put him over the big jump, by reason of p'litical crimes; an' nacherally, him not bein' born yesterday, he seeks refooge as a exile in Arizona.'

"Tutt's explanation gains adherents, ontil one day when Bismark Dutch comes romancin' into Wolfville on a mule—it's the single time he visits us—an', after tankin' up successful, reetires singin' a ballad which Peets calls *Die Wacht am Rhine*, the same bein' the Dutch *Star Spangled Banner*. His carollin' this yere madrigal don't sound like he's a p'litical refyoogee much, but on the contrary shows him an' his gov'ment to be as thick as thieves. Which last knocks Tutt's theery about him bein' a exile on the head.

"For myse'f I never agrees with either Tutt or Boggs. Nor yet with the stage company, when they claims Bismark Dutch is a holdup, or at least has struck a *cache* where long-ago route agents has done hid their loot. The gold he exhibits in Tucson, when stiffenin' his hand as to flour, syrup, salt-hoss an' air-tights, is every splinter Spanish money, each piece more'n seventy years old. The stage company never handles no sech lucre; an' to go chargin' 'round, hintin' as how that *dinero* is theirs, crowds mighty clost to the preepost'rous.

"My own notion, upheld by somethin' more than roomer, is that Bismark Dutch comes scoutin' for buried treasure from the jump. The line I gets is he's last from Chihuahua, over in Mexico, where he's been sent by some Dutch outfit of learnin' to write a book about the Greasers. Some'ers in his pokin' about, he's crossed up

with word, most likely written word, about them Spanish yellow boys. At which he lets go all holds, deecends on Arizona all spraddled out, an' exhoomes the same.

"Which the utmost space Bismark Dutch is camped within the shadow of our protection, don't measure up three months. Not that said protectin' shadow is plumb deep, seein' he sityooates himse'f a day's ride away, over at the Tucson end of the canyon. It's the mercy of hell, added to aborig'nal forbearance, that he emerges from sech residence onskelped. I reckon at that the Apaches comes round frequent an' looks him over—for the mountains is full of 'em that a-way—but passes him an' his daughter up as cripples an' loonatics. He himse'f is part paralyzed, his left arm hangin' loose an' dead; an' as for the girl, even a Apache makes out at a glance how she's as topsey-turvey mental as a mountain sheep. Shore! Injuns never molests cripples an' crazy folks, regyardin' 'em as onder the speshul gyardianship of the Great Sperit. It's one of a Injun's few redeemin' feachures.

"We learns first of Bismark Dutch from Old Monte. Over to the north end of the canyon, an' west of the trail, stands a little old stone wickeyup. The name it goes by, when we alloods to it, is the 'Mexican Rock House.' It's constructed by reemote Mexicans, so long back no white gent ever makes even a guess as to when. All we knows is it's thar when we trails in, an' no one livin' in it; an', since no one's that feeble-witted as to want to live in it an' the hills swarmin' with Injuns, it remains

onokepied ontil this reedic'lous Bismark Dutch comes weavin' along.

"Old Monte regales us one evenin' with a yarn about some pecooliar party goin' into camp in the Mexican Rock House. It seems he crosses up with Bismark Dutch, prowlin' about on the trail, as he's bringin' in the stage.

"'But since this nondeescript talks in a onknown tongue,' says Old Monte, 'I can't make out what he's drivin' at more'n if its Chinee. Which it's obv'ous he's as crazy as a woman's watch. Thar's a girl, too—darter most likely—as wild an' shy as a mule-eared deer. I'd shore say she's as locoed as her old man.'

"'Is she pretty?' asks Faro Nell.

"'She ain't no lamp of beauty, Nell,' says Old Monte. 'Mebby she'd look sweeter if she's fatted up, bein' as fleshless that a-way as my whip-stock.'

"We-all don't attach no weight to Old Monte's remarks about Bismark Dutch an' his daughter bein' locoed, by reason of his licker. Not that we're likely to go saddlin' up an' ridin' round permiscus, even if we does. A gent's free to be crazy in Arizona, if he so prefers. So long as his vagaries don't take the form of stickin' up the stage, or brandin' another gent's calves, or stealin' his ponies, or holdin' six kyards in a friendly game, public feelin' puts no queries.

"'What for a lookin' tarrapin is this remark'ble squatter?' asks Peets, who likes to listen to Old Monte talk.

"'Which he's hidjeous approachin' horned toads!' returns Old Monte, sloppin' out another drink.

"'Horned toads?' repeats Peets. 'Horned toads is all right, so you knows your toads.'

"'What I means is this,' replies Old Monte sort o' irritated, thinkin' Peets is jeerin' at him. 'He's got a onfav'rable gnurllyfied lookin' face, same as you sees kyarved on the far ends of fiddles. Besides, he's all broke down on his nigh side by palsy or somethin'; that left wing of his'n ain't in play more'n a rotten beanstalk.'

"When, later, Bismark Dutch comes rackin' along into Wolfville mule-back, we sizes him up for ourselves. He goes over to Red Dog the same day, an' it's as if he's takin' stock of his environments. The stage company calls attention to this, as deenotin' turpitood; but no one else regyards it in that light, corp'rations bein' nacherally s'spicious. Besides, what's more to be expected than for a newcomer to go floatin' hither an' yon about the range that a-way, locatin' himse'f?

"After Bismark Dutch looks Red Dog over, he returns ag'in to Wolfville—tharby displayin' his good sense—fills up on Black Jack's nose-paint, an' reetires warblin' them native patriotic hymns as chronicled. It's this yere trip, after doo deebate, we enrolls him as 'Bismark Dutch.' Also, for looks an' palsy he's all Old Monte describes.

"Most of us has forgot Bismark Dutch, when one afternoon Old Monte remarks casyooal:

"'You-all recalls about old Bismark's nigh fin bein' out o' reepair? Nevertheless an' notwithstandin' he's on the shoot jest the same. I glimpses the fresh pelt of

a bobcat, as I comes squanderin' along, tacked up an' sun-dryin' on his teepee door.'

"Public int'rest refooses to cock its y'ears at this. To come round tellin' that some gent can shoot some, ain't no way to create ripples in Arizona. Which it'd be more apt to make folks set up an' bat their eyes, to hear he couldn't. Old Monte's manifesto that Bismark Dutch is not wholly ignorant of firearms, would have gone in one y'ear an' out the other, only it gets subsequent confirmation.

"They does a heap of careless talkin' over in Tucson. Folks thar has already done commenced to don city airs, an' swell 'round meetropol'tan. Which I've frequent noticed that, jest as a outfit begins to ape the East, it takes to waxin' reckless an' onbuckled conversational. The Tucson attention is roused by two things about Bismark Dutch. One is he never had no money in the Tucson bank; an' the other is he not only possesses plenteous wealth, but pays for chuck an' fire-water an' sim'lar necessaries in them ancient Spanish yellow pieces I refers to prior. Also, it's no time after he locates himse'f at the Mexican Rock House—an' this is excitin' speshul—before he begins to ship express packages to Europe—Berlin, if mem'ry's keepin' its feet. These yere packages he valyoos at five thousand dollars per; an' to heft one of 'em shows it's some'ers about twenty pounds.

"'Gold!' says the express agent, comparin' valyoo to heft; an' between us I strings my chips with that astoote express gent in them concloosions.

"When the express gent says 'Gold!' it starts all the clackin' mill-wheels of Tucson conjectchoor to workin' over-time. Likewise it opens up a line of proof as to Bismark Dutch bein' mod'rately on the shoot.

"The last struggles to the surface this fashion. It's at the Red Light when a skeered dejected-seemin' party hitches his cha'r up alongside of Enright's, an' tells how Bismark Dutch cuts loose at him with a rifle. As lendin' corrob'ration, he shows where a bullet's burned the calf of his laig. It's his idee the stranglers ought to move some in the business.

"'Whatever be you doin' to this Dutchman?' asks Enright. 'You shore don't aim to tell me he ups an' whangs away at you, jest to try the sights on his gun?'

"With that the creased party confesses, some shamefaced, how the tales about Bismark Dutch changin' in Spanish pieces at the Tucson stores, an' sendin' bags of doubloons to Europe, sets his imagination to millin', an' he allows he'll go spyin' 'round to locate where he gets 'em.

"'You see,' says the creased party, 'pologetic, 'I'm a prospector.'

"'Oh, you're a prospector!' returns Enright, plenty sarcastic. 'Permit me to add you're likewise lucky to be alive. Now if you was to come catfootin' about my camp, they'd need a blanket wharin to collect your reemains. It's a cow pony to a prairie dog, I'd shoot you in two.' Then to Jack Moore: 'Jack, at a earliest el'gible chance, take a squint at that old Dutch party's rifle. If, as I fears, it's a inferior weepon, see to it he

gets a proper one instanter. In case, however, his present arm'ment should prove all right, notch up the hind sight a p'int or two. I jedge, from this yere prospector's laig, he's shootin' too low.'

"Jack says he will; wharat the creased prospector looks oncomfort'ble."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CANYON HOLD-UP

ABOUT the time Bismark Dutch onfurls his blankets in the Mexican Rock House, seizes his rifle an' takes to bustin' at bobcats an' prospectors indifferent, over by the Cow Springs, as ornery a passel of rustlers as ever dangles at the loop-end of a lariat, builds 'em a dug-out an' goes into camp. This yere labor of a dug-out gives the play a air of perm'nency, that a-way, which appeals invidious to us folks who has cows an' calves to lose. Likewise the stage company's apprehensions takes to ghost-dancin'; the thought of so seelect a bevy of blacklaigs, established so near at hand, gives 'em the shivers. The agent goes to the extent of talkin' it over with Enright on the quiet.

"'Whatever can you do?' asks Enright in response. 'You-all ain't permitted to up an' blow folks' lights out, simply because you distastes their looks. Which a lack of pulcritood ain't on offence. We'll have to wait until them Cow Springs guerrilas starts somethin'.'

"Thar's three, by corral count, in this yere Cow Springs contingent—three, an' a Mexican to cook for 'em. The leader is Big Steve; an' he clothes himse'f, as in a weddin' garment, with the repyootation of havin' downed divers an' sundry citizens in private wars of his own.

They do allow, too, that once this Big Steve gets to drinkin', he brags about them homicides. For myse'f, never havin' had the pleasure of seein' him drunk none, I'm onable to say. If he does, sech boasts shows he's plumb vulgar in the extreme.

"As a excoose for livin', Big Steve puts it up cold he's a cattleman—him an' his felon *campañeros.* Since no gent ever sees no cattle, an' he don't announce no brand, sech bluffs is held to be figments. To be shore, a talkative sport shows up from over to'ards Waco once, who lets on that Big Steve is, for a limited period, in the cattle trade in Texas. He tells how Big Steve starts with a orig'nal herd of two old steers, an' the followin' spring round-up brands eighty calves. Wharupon his fellow laborers in the walks of cattle gets jealous of his success an' runs Big Steve out.

"Enright an' the balance of us finds much in them Waco rem'nescences to feed our feelin's.

"'An' at that,' says Enright; 'mebby when all's in, it ain't cattle he's after; mebby he's only smugglin' between us an' Mexico.'

"Big Steve at the go-off makes but one excursion into Wolfville. On that occasion, havin' absorbed the 'leventh drink, he begins—his outlaw companions actin' as audience—to talk a heap loud. Cl'arin' his valves with a whoop which shakes the glasses on the Red Light bar, he backs up ag'inst the front of that house of entertainment, an' roars out:

"'Which I shore feels that contrary I jest won't stay yere nor go anywhere else!'

"Jack Moore, whose dooty as kettle tender is to mod-'rate eboolient sperits, don't happen to be present none; wharfore Cherokee assoomes the pressure. Gettin' up from behind his faro lay-out—the Red Light bein' Cherokee's place of business—he sa'nters forth an' fronts up to Big Steve.

"'It ain't for me,' says Cherokee, 'to go knockin' the horns off the innocent happiness of folks, but if I was you I'd not emit that yell no more. Thar's a party, somewhat resemblin' you for gen'ral worthlessness, who in a fool attempt to buffalo this village cuts loose a yell like that, an' we gives him inexpensive interment on Boot Hill.'

"Big Steve takes in Cherokee with one convincin' glance, an' grows moote as a oyster. It's the only time them Cow Springs hold-ups tries anything on us.

"Not but what they has their merry hours. Thar's a Mexican plaza over back towards the line, an', when they feels the need of a holiday, they repairs thither an' stands it on its he'pless head. But they never ropes at Wolfville after Cherokee gives notice. Likewise, as raw material for a shakin' up, they coppers Red Dog, Troo, Red Dog is not without its blemishes; but bein' meek an' lowly an' long-sufferin', that a-way, ain't among 'em none. Which the inborn b'ligerency of that Red Dog camp is sech as to cause it to go about on perpetchooal tip-toe, growlin' same as a sorehead dog! Thar's nothin' to it! If Big Steve an' his gang was to go bulgin' into Red Dog, allowin' to put things on a gala basis, they'd last about as long as a pint of whisky at a

barn-raisin'. Them Red Dog sports would split 'em into kindlin' in the flourish of a fiddle bow!

"Could Red Dog clean up Wolfville? Son, it ill beseems one who's teeterin' along in the deeclinin' twilight of his days, to go exaltin' his bazoo concernin' carnage. But, you hear me! if Wolfville an' Red Dog ever hooks up hostile, historians will shore head the chapter, 'Red Dog's Last Days.' Whar Red Dog proudly r'ars its crest, only a onrecogniz'ble heap of grease an' ashes will be found, polka-dottin' the sorrowful bosom of the plain. Off to one side, Wolfville—an' never the smell of fire about her garments—will be pursooin' the even tenors an' contraltos of her ways.

"Do you know"—and here the old gentleman gazed at me with reproachful earnestness—"thar's moments when a blind chill comes gropin' its way along my back, as I'm seized of fears that somehow you-all don't 'ppreciate Wolfville at its full strength. Now to give you a c'rrect notion: Do you remember, back in your school days, where the question arises in nacheral ph'losophy, as to whatever'll be the toomulchoous result if a irresist'ble force encounters a immov'ble body? Well, son, yereafter b'ar in mind that the answer to that conundrum is simply 'Wolfville.'

"Thar ain't been no stick-up of a stage in our neck of woods, for the bigger part of a year. Route agents comes an' goes. They'll get plumb busy for a spell; an' it's 'hands up!' yere, thar an' elsewhere, in a perfect ep'demic. Hold-up people seem for the moment as thick as rats in a wheat-rick. At sech eepocks it's up

to all hands an' the cook to pull themselves together, which they seldom fails to do, an' run off or kill off—never mindin' which—these yere maraudin' miscreents.

"Bein' immoone from hold-ups for so long, it don't s'prise us none when Old Monte comes frothin' into camp one evenin' with a story to tell. He's at the head of the canyon, he says, on the run in, when a rifle cracks from some'ers up among the rocks. The outlaw back of the gun—an' the scheme's workmanlike enough—tries for the off leader. Once the leader's down, it's a cinch the stage'll wait his crim'nal convenience.

"But the hold-up ondershoots. Instead of gettin' the leader through the head, the same bein' his orig'nal design, the bullet comes flyin' low, an' cuts the outside rein clost up to the bits. It's done as slick as if it's slashed in two with a bowie. After cuttin' the rein, the bullet snips a piece of hide out o' the nigh leader's knee. Thar's a run-away; Old Monte, because of the cut rein, bein' powerless to guide or stop. The six plungin' hosses, wild an' wilder every jump, goes t'arin' up the canyon, the stage rockin' an' rollin' but upright on its four wheels.

"As the stage goes surgin' off, the hold-ups makes a witless play. They sends a shower of lead after the retreatin' veheecle—no least chance of stoppin' it!—an' bumps off a maverick who's perched up behind. By word of Old Monte, an' that of the express messenger who's ridin' shotgun, both plenty adept, the shootin's done by three guns.

"Nothin' in a smash-up or break-down way ensoos;

for the six hosses, locoed as they be by fear, still keeps the trail. Strikin' a sandy stretch, they slows down to sech degrees that—what with the brake which Old Monte sets to the last notch—the express messenger jumps to the ground, runs along the team, an' by gettin' hold of the leaders' bits see-saws 'em to a halt.

"Something of the eediotic sort of these yere hold-ups can be guessed at by recallin' how they wastes their fragrance on a incomin' stage. The only show for riches is on a stage goin' out. Stickin' up in-comin' coaches that a-way, wouldn't pay day wages!

"Beyond the cut rein, an' the dead party up behind, thar's no damage done. We're inclined to resent the beefin' of the latter gent. He's only one of them travelin' salesmen; but sech things, left onchecked, swells into preecedents. Give some folks a inch an' they'll take a ell, partic'larly hold-ups.

"Thar's no fashion o' doubt but it's Big Steve an' his pards.

"'Still,' as Enright puts it, 'the trouble lies in a utter an' discouragin' want of proofs.'

"Lynch law, while eelastic, mustn't be stretched too far; shorely not to incloode parties ag'inst whom the most you can say is you don't like their looks. None the less we figgers we'll go rummagin' over to the Cow Springs, an' put some p'inted queries.

"It's yere the game begins to roll our way. About the time we're ready to saddle up, who comes caperin' in but Big Steve an' his bandit pards. They puts their ponies in the corral, an' makes tracks for the Red Light;

thar they takes to h'istin' in licker with both hands, an' all mighty nervous an' boist'rous.

"None of us goes near 'em, the same bein' a strategic move su'gested by Enright.

"'Which it's their fears has drove 'em in,' says that wise old long-horn. 'All we got to do is let 'em pitch on their ropes till they throws themselves.'

"Enright's head is level. As their licker begins to get action, Big Steve an' his pards takes to murmurin' among themselves, an' all in a ill-yoosed vein. Their talk is about the stage bein' stood up; an' how they don't reckon on permittin' Wolfville, or any other camp, to track 'round sayin' it's them none. It's a fine state of affairs, they says, if a band of innocent cow people can't set about their fire, an' a stage get stopped without they be accoosed!

"That's how their talk runs; an' it shows they're guilty, drunk an' skeered—all three. How be they to know that the stage has been stood up? The roomer so far ain't even crossed to Red Dog. Much less is it likely it's gone riotin' out to the Cow Springs!

"'Thar's not a moral doubt!' says Enright emphatic as him an' Jack Moore confers one side. 'An' yet, as the kyards lay, if we brings 'em before us an' they stops talkin', we'll be out on a limb ag'in for want of what law-wolves calls "legal proofs".'

"'Most likely,' returns Jack, 'the cunnin' move would be to simply an' silently swing an' rattle with 'em ontil eevents shapes up. As you says, Sam, it's their fears that a-way drives 'em into town. Knowin' themselves

guilty, they allows we-all'll be shore to come searchin' for 'em; an' so they decides, for the looks, to beat us to it.'

"'What's your own notion, Jack?' asks Enright.

"'My idee is this: It's the frightened gent who, speakin' gen'ral, reaches first for his gun. Now by follow-in' these stoodents in sin about, an' lookin' at 'em some severe, we renders 'em that hyster'cal they'll start a bombardment. Once they onlimbers their guns, the rest is easy. I thinks I sees my way through to a finale, which'll leave no reason for the stranglers to convene.'

"'Well,' returns Enright, 'be discreet, Jack. If in the course of hooman eevents, however, these yere parties does get wiped out, I don't look to see no pop'lar reemonstrance based on Arizona's havin' suffered a blow.'

"'Gents,' says Jack a moment later to Boggs an' Texas Thompson, 'it looks like a battle; an' thar's a couple of vacancies.'

"'Enough said,' grins Texas.

"As the three stands at the Red Light bar, prepar'tory to issuing forth, Boggs whispers across to Black Jack:

"'You'll hear a dog howl in a minute—sev'ral dogs.'

"Big Steve an' his pards is jest ridin' out of the corral, as Jack with Boggs an' Texas strolls up.

"'Open order, gents!' whispers Boggs, who's an old gun-player. 'Make 'em shoot to win. Don't give 'em no chance to out-luck us, by missin' one an' downin' another accidental.'

"Boggs an' Texas an' Jack spreads out, an' comes

driftin' up on Big Steve an' his two. The sight of 'em, as Jack advises Enright, stampedes Big Steve.

"'Fight your way out, boys!' he cries.

"Like it's some new kind of cavalry drill, the three hold-ups is out of their saddles an' onto the ground in a flash, the ponies actin' as shields. The war begins: 'bangety! bang! bang!' The ponies makes tol'rable breastworks, but bad rests to shoot from. The hold-ups' bullets fly as high an' aimless as swallow-birds on a summer's eve. As ag'inst this, not bein' hampered by no ponies, both Texas an' Jack gets their men, first fire, too dead to skin.

"It's Boggs who's havin' the interestin' time. He's pa'red himse'f off with Big Steve, an' the hold-up—him openin' the *baile*—secoors the primary shot at Boggs. The latter painstakin' enthoosiast is jest pullin' his six-shooter, when Big Steve's bullet splits on the bar'l, an' a piece of lead gets jammed in between the cylinder an' the steel frame. It ties up Boggs' gun so he can't even cock it. Which he might as well have had a monkey-wrench!

"After a footile attempt or two to get action, Boggs turns disgusted an' hurls the gun at Big Steve; who's meanwhile been cuttin' loose every load in his Colt's-45, like the strikin' of a Connecticut clock. One way an' another, however, he never lands; an' when he's out his sixth cartridge, he gives a screech of terror an' swings into the saddle for a scamper.

"Big Steve don't scamper, none whatever! Boggs is too clost, an' grips him, shoulder an' hip, with a wrest-

ler's hold. Boggs is as big an' strong as a cinnamon b'ar; an', since Big Steve clamps his pony tight with a laig-hug, Boggs with one mighty twist throws both man an' mount on their sides. Which Big Steve an' that pony hits the ground like a fallin' tree! Boggs is about to accumyoolate fresh holds, when Jack carefully sends a bullet through Big Steve's head.

"At first Boggs can't onderstand; then he begins to feel nettled.

"'Well, as Doc Peets remarks,' he exclaims, 'I shore admires your *sang froid!* What license has you-all to intermeddle with this Big Steve, when by the ord'nances of single combat he's my individyooal meat?'

"'Which I gets afraid, Dan,' replies Jack, his tones deprecatory, 'you're goin' to catch him alive—a state of affairs which Enright deplores private to me in advance, as calk'lated to become embarrassin'.'

"Boggs, who's as easy mollified as a child, cl'ars up an' smiles like a day in Joone.

"'I'm wrong, Jack,' he says; 'even without old Sam's instructions. Thar's sech a thing as bein' too technicle; it's a fault I must gyard ag'inst.'

"An' now Bismark Dutch re-begins to edge himse'f into the picture. The place wharfrom them canyon hold-ups does their shootin' at the stage, is so sityooated that you-all could heave a stone down onto the roof of that Mexican Rock House where Bismark Dutch, with his crazy-hoss girl, is domiciled. Still no one regyards the old Teuton as implicated. Old Monte, mind full of bobcats an' prospectors, an' babblin' over his drink,

does try to la'nch some sech fable; but no one heeds him.

"An' yet, for obv'ous causes, Enright decides to c'llect Bismark's notions, an' learn what he hears an' sees; an' to that end he orders Jack Moore to go an' round him up. Jack, all onthinkin,' rides over to the camp of Bismark Dutch an' gives the p'lite an' yoosual salyootation.

"'House!' he yells.

"Nacherally, any right-minded gent'd expect Bismark Dutch to appear, an' engage in a peaceful pow-wow. Jack's some amazed, then, an' mighty near bein' took off his gyard, when that palsied party comes chargin' out the door, an' blazes away at him frantic with a rifle—the same, ondoubted, wharwith he's been pottin' bobcats an' prospectors.

"Jack's been shot at so much, he's as hard to hit as a loon on a lake. With the first hostile manoover he's out o' the saddle, leavin' the bullet to t'ar a hole through the cantle. The rifle Bismark Dutch is usin' is one of these yere new-fangled high-power guns, a 'thirty-thirty' they calls it. Bein' light an' little, he manages it with one hand same as if it's a six-shooter. He's reasonably ackerate, too, an', if Jack'd stayed sot, he'd have made a center shot.

"When Bismark Dutch opens on him all onannounced that a-way, Jack, more by habit than reflection, returns the fire an' nails that one remainin' hand. That member's grippin' the rifle, an' the bullet mushrooms on the iron an' makes rags an' fragments of it. As Peets says

later, when he removes Jack's bandages an, puts on fresh ones of his own:

"'Whatever may be said of it yereafter as ornamental, it shore won't win no future vogue as a hand.'

"Jack loads Bismark Dutch onto that pioneer's mule, an' brings him wounded into camp; the hollow-eyed girl trackin' along behind, though Jack tries to make her stay back.

"'Which she don't seem to savey none!' says Jack, when he relates his adventures; 'I couldn't do nothin' with her. She simply deefies me with them big eyes, an' keeps comin'.'

"Enright an' the rest of us don't have much luck with Bismark Dutch. After a f'rocious outburst in his own furrin' tongue, which is so much like lightnin' that it dazzles without illoominatin', he shets up as wordless as a clam. It's as plain as a pike-staff we can't wring another syl'ble out of him with fire, water, knife an' cord.

"'What this outfit needs, Doc,' exclaims Enright, plumb exasperated, 'is a res'dent Dutchman. I'll devote my first leesure to indoocin' one to come yere an' live. Now if we has a Dutchman among us, not like them fiddlin' dance hall mutton-heads, but one that's tamed to our customs, we might elicit somethin' out of this old ground-hawg.'

"'Which a local Dutchman,' returns the acquiescent Peets, 'would be as handy as a pocket in a shirt.'

"While nothin' good or bad is to be torn from Bismark Dutch, we gathers still less from the locoed daughter. Faro Nell tries her; but she jest sets an' stares like some

frightened animal. As for Missis Rucker, that deer-eyed girl evolves screams at sight of her; wharat said matron gets indignant.

"'Thar's no sort o' question,' says Enright at last, his tones peevish an' fault-findin', 'but what we-alls ought to hang this Bismark Dutch; his blastin' away at Jack should be s'fficient to force our hands to sech proceedure. But what gets me is the girl; her life's wropped up in this old loonatic. Besides, once we sends him skyward she's left on our hands. If we has only Bismark Dutch to contend with, our paths would be open an' plain; but this yere maiden of onsettled mind is a most disturbin' element! It's with shame I confesses that I don't know what to do. Doc, you formyoolate a play.'

"'No,' says Peets; 'my mind's as empty as a church.'

"'Well then,' declar's Enright, mighty desp'rate, 'I thinks we'd better take the hobbles off, an' throw these wild folks back on the range. As to this Bismark Dutch personal, with one hand dead an' the other done for, I reckon he's fired his last shot. It ain't as if he gets Jack neither. Moreover, if we swings him off, that girl with her loonatic eyes'll shore pester me in my sleep.'

"The camp's of one mind with Enright, Jack Moore applaudin' speshul. In a fortnight, Peets has Bismark Dutch's hand tinkered into shape, an' him an' his deer-eyed daughter lines out for furrin' climes. It looks, too, like he makes his last shipment—valyoo, five thousand; weight, per express agent's word, twenty pounds—the very day the stage is stood up. Later, we locates the

hole; it's onder the fire-place in the Mexican Rock House, an', from the size, I figgers he harvests about fifty thousand dollars. Quite a killin!

"'The same,' explains Peets, 'bein' calk'lated in his native land to put Bismark Dutch 'way up in the pictures. Mighty likely he cuts the trail that leads to it, while he's ransackin' 'round among old docyooments in Chihuahua for things to write about them Greasers.'

"'Gents,' says Boggs, motionin' to Black Jack, 'most folks, acquainted with my nacheral av'rice, 'll go 'round thinkin' that I wishes I'd happened up on them fifty thousand mese'f. But, on the squar'! I'm sort o' glad it's that locoed old Dutchman an' his girl.'

"'*Yo tambien*, Dan!' whispers Faro Nell, as she reaches round an' squeezes Boggs' hand."

CHAPTER IX

THE POPULAR SOURNESS

NO gent, onless locoed, would ever put a bet on the public." My old friend spoke with warmth, at the same time throwing down a newspaper from which the glaring headline, "Overthrow of a Popular Idol," stared out. "Not," he continued, lapsing into his customary manner of calm not to say benign philosophy—"not that I'm likely to get caught out on any sech limb personal, me makin' it an onbreakable roole to bet on nothin' that can talk. Animals is different. A party who wagers his riches on animals, gets somethin' reesemblin' an even break for his money. Bein' onable to talk that a-way, animals is limited in their mootual commoonications. That saves 'em from given' or takin' advice, an' leaves it possible for gents of jedgment to half way figger on whatever they'll do next."

"Evidently, you don't believe deeply in the wisdom of man," said I.

"No, I don't regyard hoomanity as so plumb wise. You-all could take me into the halls of Congress, an' plant me in the legislatif foreground as a question; you might get a member to introdooce a resolootion sayin' I'm a white man without a cross. Instantly, an opp'-

sition will take the floor, claimin' I'm a Injun; an' I'll play in a heap of luck if a third party don't form for the purpose of showin' I'm a Mexican. All the time, too, that them statesmen is wranglin' over my tribe an' strain, thar won't be a mule between the oceans, but would know I'm white at the drop of the hat—know it in the dark.

"Shore, to my pore thinkin' animals has a heap more savey than folks. Thar's the elk. When he allows he'll go to bed some, he begins negotiations by walkin' in a half-mile circle. Then he marches into the safe center of the circle, plunks himse'f down, an' is as sound asleep as a tree in a moment—all but his nose. Bein' inside that circle, if a wolf or a man or a mountain lion is followin' his trail, no matter how the wind shifts, his nose gives him warnin'. Even a mule-eared deer, makin' a perpetyooal skirmish line of his nose, goes feedin' up the wind. Do folks? As often as otherwise they makes a speshulty of gettin' the breeze to their ignorant backs; an' go romancin' off into the teeth of trouble, talkin' about their 'reasonin' powers,' an' feelin' sorry for what they calls the 'lower animals.'

"At that, you're not to go followin' off no wrong wagon track, an' assoome that animals, as eevents shift, don't shift their instincts to match 'em. When every Injun goes shootin' bows an' arrers, an' every white gent packs a squirrel rifle, bullets sixty to the pound, grizzly b'ars, as I once tells you former, treats said armaments with disdain. The grizzlies knows thay can't be hurt none by sech footile weepons; an', far from bein' worried by the

'Westward ho!' of the white man, they regyards emigrants an' their fam'lies with satisfaction, as additions to the vis'-ble food supply. Later, when we gets to work on 'em with them high-power big-bore guns, an' knocks 'em over too dead to skin, grizzlies changes utter. To-day you-all couldn't get clost enough to a grizzle to give him a roast apple. At the sight of innocent papooses, even, he goes riotin' off through the bresh, up hill an' down dale, like his r'ar's afire.

"No; as I was observin' when I gets deeflected onto b'ars, folks ain't so plumb sagacious—not even Wolfville folks. Back in the old days, if the stage breaks down on account of rotten axles, do we-alls cuss out the company? Not at all; we burns the ground around Old Monte, when even the prairie dogs onderstands how that pore old slave of alcohol ain't no more reesponsible for rotten axles than for the quality of Red Light nose-paint.

"Which this partic'lar victim of pop'lar wrath"—here the old gentleman tossed a scornful thumb towards the paper, where it lay on the floor—"is a office holder. He ain't entitled to no sympathy, for if he had owned a lick of sense he could have seen his downfall comin'. The finish of office holders is allers alike; it's the finish of the army mule. Each of 'em is some day led out all onexpected, an' branded 'I. C.' which means 'Inspected an' condemned,' an' figgertively speakin' your mule an' your office holder rots down right thar."

"Did you ever have an ambition to hold office?" I asked, more with a purpose to tease than elicit information.

"Me hold office? I'd sooner hold a baby! Not that I aims to speak disparagin' of infants neither, deemin' 'em as roobies above price. But nacherally you-all saveys that me bein' a bachelor, an' tharfore onmarried a whole lot, babies in my case is barred.

"Speakin' of office holders, I can't say I've a heap of use for 'em. Office holders, taken in the herd, is so plumb egreegious—doin' so little towards he'pin' the public, while allowin' they'll do so much. At that I don't reckon it's all their fault. A man—slam him on the scales an' weigh him—is a mighty puny creature. The public, as ag'inst this, is mighty big; an' for him to go talkin' of he'pin' the public is as though he talks of he'pin' the Mississippi. The public goes pirootin' into a 'lection, an' prodooces a gov'nor; an' the transaction reeminds me a heap of that hill in the fables, which goes rockin' an' weavin' all over the pampas, a-skeerin' everybody to death, an' winds up its onseemly ghost-dancin' by bringin' forth a mouse. Gov'nor! Does 'lectin' some ornery no-'count party to be gov'nor render him less ornery? Which you-all might as well throw a cow-saddle onto a jack-rabbit, thinkin' to make a mustang of it!

"Take the biggest gent on the list, an' construct a gov'nor of him: whatever can he do? The job's so gigantic, an' he's so plumb little, you'll find him as he'pless to change the eternal face of things as though you'd made him gov'nor of a mountain. The best he gets out of it will mebby be to scratch his hon'rable name on the onockepied face of some rock ledge; an' at that the moss'll

overgrow it in a week an' blot it out. The next gent to climb the hill won't even be able to make out his 'nitials.

"It's my notion," went on the old gentleman, heaving a sigh—"it's my notion, foaled of years of experience, that the biggest among us might better mod'rate his se'f-esteem. He can make up his mind he's shore powerless to give his hour a lift to any great extent. An' then ag'in, it ain't needed none; it's too much like givin' Providence a lift. That gent comes nearest to gettin' his own inconsequential measure, who concloods that, when he's won out his blankets an' his three feeds a day, together with a occasional drink, he's beat this game called livin' for about all he's goin' to get.

"He'p the public? Even if you could, it wouldn't be worth while. You'd about wind up at the leetle eend of the horn, same as this office-holdin' tarrapin in the noospaper. Publics is ongrateful. He'pin' the public out of a hole, is as oncertain as he'pin' a b'ar out of a hole; it's bloo chips to white that the first offishul act of either'll be to chaw you up.

"As aidin' me to this concloosion, I sees somethin' of the sort come off in the c'rreer of Doc Peets. This is 'way back yonder, when Wolfville is cuttin' its milk teeth, an' prior to the dawnin' of sech evidences of progress as the Bird Cage Op'ry House, an' Colonel Sterett's *Daily Coyote*. It's before the Washwoman's War, an' antedates the nuptials of Tucson Jennie with Dave Tutt by years.

"What's the story? It don't amount to much, an' is valyooable only as 'llustratin' what I says on the

footility, not to mention the peril, of tryin' to turn a commoonal trick. Peets cuts loose to he'p the public; an' the first move he gets a stack down wrong, an' jest manages to round on the play in time to keep himse'f from bein' swept plumb off the board. You-all has heard me yeretofore alloode to Peets, as the best eddicated an' deepest sharp in the territory. What I'm to reelate is not to be took ag'inst them utterances. Peets is young when the eepisode occurs; later, when years has come an' gone an' thar's a pretty hefty accumyoolation of rings at the base of Peets' horns, you-all couldn't have coaxed him into no sech trap, not for gold an' precious stones.

"It has its beginnin' in the comin' to town of Tacoma Tom, an' the subsequent discovery of that kyard-expert dead out back of the dance hall, a bullet through his back. It shore looks like somebody's been objectin' to Tacoma with a gun. Thar ain't so much as a whisper of suspicion p'intin' to the partic'lar sport who thus finds fault with Tacoma, or what for. Wolfville is baffled complete.

"This bein' left in the dark, op'rates to rub the public fur the wrong way. Not that Wolfville feels as though it can't keep house without deceased; at best he's but a fleetin' form of tinhorn hold-up, of no social standin', an' it's apples to ashes the stranglers would have had Jack Moore run him out o' camp inside a week. Still, it's a case of a party gettin' downed, an' the public's been eddicated to at least expect a solootion, even if thar ain't no lynchin'. In this instance the public don't get neither; wharfore it takes to frettin' a little onder the

quiet collar. Also, Red Dog goes to makin' reemarks; an' this last so shames the more morbid sperits, like Boggs, they begins to talk of movin' to Tucson.

"While public feelin' is thus strained, the general eye sort o' takes to focusin' on a Mexican, who's been hangin' out over to the corrals for about a useless month. It grows to be the common view that this yere Mexican may be spared from among us, without upsettin' the whole Wolfville frame-work. Troo, thar's nothin' to connect him with the bumpin' off of Tacoma, except he's a Mexican; but in a commoonity which favors hangin' folks not so much for what they do as for what they are, this saddle-colored fact of a sunburned nationality goes some distance. The boys takes to murmurin' among themselves, as they slops out their Old Jordan at the Red Light counter, that to hang said Mexican to the windmill wouldn't hurt that water-drawin' contraption a little bit. Thar's even people who claims it's calk'lated for the windmill's embellishment.

"The Mexican himse'f must have been one of them mind-readers; for, while the whisper yoonitin' him to the windmill goes meanderin' up an' down, he of a sudden disappears entire. This ontoward evaporation of the Mexican, at the only time he's reely needed, is regyarded as a hoss on the camp; an' with that, public feelin' takes on a more exasperatin' edge than prior. Likewise, Red Dog is thar with the yoosual barbed bluff, to the insultin' effect that Wolfville manages its kyards so clumsy, that even a blinded greaser reads its hand.

"It's while the pop'lar temper is thus morose, that Old

Man Enright an' Doc Peets comes together casyooal in the New York Store.

"'What's the matter with the camp, Sam?' asks Peets. He's payin' for a bloo shirt, with pearl buttons, he's bought. 'It looks as though the outfit's on a dead kyard.'

"Peets' tones is anxious. When it comes to settin' up all night with Wolfville, an' rockin' its cradle an' warmin' its milk, give me Peets!

"'Somethin' ought to be done,' he continyoos. 'As the play stands, the pop'lar sperit—once so proud an' high—is slowly but shorely boggin' down.'

"'It's Tacoma gettin' beefed,' says Enright, 'an' our omittin' to stretch that corral greaser. Thar's a bet we overlooks, Doc! We never should have let that felon get away.'

"'But both of us,' observes Peets, 'you-all as chief of the vig'lance committee, an' me as a member in full standin', lives well aware thar ain't the shadow of evidence that the Mexican wipes out Tacoma.'

"'None the less,' returns Enright, 'the boys sort o' lotted on a lynchin'. You saveys, Doc, that it ain't so important to hang the right gent, as to hang some gent when looked for. Besides, to let a Mexican run out from between our fingers, that a-way, is mortifyin' to the camp's se'f-love.'

"'Well,' reemarks Peets, 'somethin' to arouse public enthoosiasm is the imperatif demand. If we-all permits the boys to go gloomin' 'round in their present frame, they'll shore take to chewin' one another's mane.'

"Enright nods assent, but offers no su'gestions.

"'See yere!' exclaims Peets, after a pause—Peets is more fertile than Enright—'I've roped onto an idee. The games is dead at this hour; suppose we rounds up the camp for a talk. A pow-wow, though nothin' results, is calk'lated to prodooce a soothin' effect.'

"'Which I'm agree'ble,' remarks Enright; 'but how be we goin' to convene 'em? Back in Tennessee, in my natif village of Pineknot, we used to ring the town bell. Wolfville bein' deevoid of town bells, I takes it the next best move is for me to s'anter to the r'ar door, an' shake the loads out o' my gun. That'll excite pop'lar cur'osity; the boys'll come a-runnin' to see who gets it.'

"Enright reetires to the back door, an' bangs away some frantic three or four times with his six-shooter. The day bein' quiet, the effect is plenty vivacious; everybody comes t'arin' over all spraddled out. That is every gent but Black Jack comes t'arin'; him bein' on watch at the Red Light, he don't feel free to leave the bar.

"'Any one creased?' asks Dave Tutt, out o' breath an' pantin'.

"'None whatever,' replies Peets, easy an' suave. Then lettin' on he don't notice the disapp'intment that spreads itse'f from face to face, he proceeds: 'This yere is a bloodless foosilade, an' is resorted to as a means of convokin' the best minds of the camp. Thar's a subject of common interest to be proposed; an' to get for'ard in order my motion is that our honored leader, Mister Enright, be requested to preeside.'

"'Hold on a minute,' interjects Boggs, 'ontil I signs up to Black Jack thar ain't no corpses. He's that inquisitive, an' him bein' tied to his dooties as barkeep that a-way, he'd eat his heart out if I don't.'"

CHAPTER X

DOC PEETS' ERROR

BY the time Boggs relieves Black Jack, the meetin' is in line, Enright employin' a dry-goods box as desk, an' the audience camped about permiscus on crates an' boxes. Faro Nell, whose love of Wolfville is second only to Peets', has a front seat.

"When the meetin's ready, Peets arises an' assoomes the pressure.

"'As author conj'intly with the cha'r'—yere Peets bows p'litely to Enright—'of this yere deemonstration, I takes it on myse'f with the hon'rable cha'r's permission, to briefly state its objecks.'

"'Let her roll!' says Enright, gently tappin' on the dry-goods box with his yoosual gavel, the same bein' a Colt's-45.

"'Gents,' resoomes Peets, castin' a beamin' eye about the scene, 'I desires to avoid all reference to recent events of a harrowin' nacher, concernin' the late Tacoma Tom an' a Mexican person we don't lynch; an' so, comin' squar' down to the turn, I ventures the reemark that thar's somethin' wrong with Wolfville. As affairs stand, our pride is oozin' away, our brotherly love is turnin' sour, our sperit is peterin', an', the way we're p'intin' out, his-t'ry will one day jestify the low reemarks which Red Dog is makin' at our expense. Havin' said so much, an' be-

fore advancin' further, gents, let me pause an' invite your views.'

"'Which you-all hears the Doc,' says Enright, softly beatin' on the box like he's keepin' time to music. 'Any gent with views should pour 'em forth. Red Dog has its envious eye on this outfit; it will take advantage of any weakenin'. So far Red Dog has been out-lucked, out-dealt, out-held an' out-played; Wolfville has downed her on the deal an' on the draw. But to make the footure like the past, deemands that we act promptly an' in yoonison, an' give the sityooation, morally speakin', the best whirl of the wheel.'

"'Recognizin',' observes Dave Tutt, risin' to his feet, 'the trooth of what the Doc has said, an' regyardin' that gent as possessin' the wisdom of serpents, I desires to j'ine with him in sayin' somethin' public must be did. I asks tharfore, whatever for a play would it be for us to rope up one of these yere lecture sharps? Thar's a maverick of that breed in Tucson now; an', if Wolfville says the word, I'll stampede over to-morry an' tie him down. He could lecture in Hamilton's dance hall, an' to my jedgment it would look like a mighty meetropolitan racket.'

"'Whatever is this shorthorn lecturin' on?' asks Jack Moore.

"'Roosia,' says Tutt. 'He's got maps, an' books an' the entire lay-out from deal box to check rack. Folks as ought to know, gives it out cold that he turns as strong a game for as high a limit, as any lecturer they ever goes ag'inst.'

"'Onder other an' what one might deescribe as a more concrete condition of public feelin',' interjects Peets, 'thar could be nothin' better than the su'gestion of Mister Tutt. But my fear is that Wolfville ain't in no proper mood for lectures. What we needs is not so much a lecture, which is for a day, but somethin' lastin', sech as the example of a reefined an' exalted home-life blossomin' in our midst. What the hour pines for is the ameeloratin' an' mollifyin' inflooence of an elevated womanhood. Shore, we has our little fav'rite, Faro Nell, an' the gent never jingles a spur in Wolfville who wouldn't ride his pony to death in her behalf. But Nell's young—merely a yearlin' like. What our wants require is the picture of a happy household, wharof the feminine head, in the triple role of woman, wife an' mother, while cherishin' an' carin' for her husband, sheds likewise a beenign ray for us.'

"'Rah! for Doc Peets!' cries Faro Nell, wavin' her stetson. Then, to Cherokee, who's planted near: 'Ain't the Doc jest splendid?'

"Cherokee smiles but says nothin', bein' a silent sharp.

"'Pausin', says Peets, 'to thank our beautiful young town's lady for that cheer, I surges on to say I learns from first sources, indeed from the gent himse'f that one of our worthiest citizens, none other in trooth than Abilene Davis, well an' fav'rably known as blacksmith at the stage station, has a lovely wife in Kansas. The town so forchoonate as to be her residence is Caldwell. I tharfore recommends, as the sense of the meetin', that Mister Davis bring on this Caldwell lady, to reign over his domes-

tic hearth. The O. K. Restauraw, bein' the hostelry wharat Mister Davis munches his daily *chili-con-carne*, will lose a boarder; but Missis Rucker, who conducts it, will not reepine for that. What is the O. K. Restauraw's loss will be Wolfville's immortal gain, an' for Wolfville Missis R. is proud to make a sacrifice. Mister Cha'rman, my recommendation takes the form of a motion.'

"'Which said motion,' observes Enright, 'onless I hears a protest, goes as it lays. Thar bein' no objections, the cha'r declares it to be the commands of this meetin' that Abilene bring on his wife.'

"'See yere, Mister Pres'dent,' breaks in Abilene, lookin' some hectic an' wild, 'as the he'pless victim of this plunge on the part of the body pol'tic, I rises to ask do my feelin's count? Which if I ain't in this—if it's considered the c'rrect dido to lay waste a party who in his lowly way is doin' his public an' his private best to play a pore hand well, why! say so an' I'll pack in. Impugnin' no gent's motives, I'm still free to reemark that these yere proceedin's looks like the offspring of crim'nal caprice.'

"'I will call the gent's attention,' observes Enright, a heap dignified, 'to the fact that thar's no disp'sition to crowd his hand, or force a play to which he seems averse. If from any knowledge we supposes we entertains, of the possession on his part of a sperit which might rise to the aid of a gen'ral need—I shore hopes I makes my meanin' plain—we over-deals the kyards, all we can do is 'pologize, throw our hands in the center, an' shuffle an' deal ag'in.'

"'Not at all,' breaks in Abilene, not likin' the gray

gleam in Enright's eye; 'an' no offence to be given, took nor meant. Let me say I has the highest respect for the cha'r, personal. Likewise, I freequent observes that I looks on Doc Peets as among the best feachures of Arizona. But this yere dash into my fam'ly life needs to be thought out. You-all don't know the lady; which, she bein' my wife, I ain't puttin' on no dog when I says I do.'

"'Does she look like me, Abilene?' chirps up Faro Nell.

"'Not necessar'ly, Nell,' says Abilene. 'To be shore I ain't basked none recent in her s'ciety, an' mem'ry may be blurred, but as I recalls she looks a whole lot like an Injun uprisin'. None the less, she's as excellent a lady as ever fondles a flapjack; I'll say that! Only gents'—an' yere Abilene's tones takes on a pleadin' sound—'she's uppish; that's whatever, she's shore uppish! I might add,' continyoos Abilene, in a deprecatory 'pologetic way, 'that inasmuch as I wasn't jest lookin' for the camp to turn to me in its hour of need, this proposal to transplant my wife to Wolfville is an honor as onexpected as a rattlesnake in a roll of blankets. I'm the last sport to lay down on a dooty, when the same's sawed off on me proper; still, I thinks we ought to approach this enterprise plenty conserv'tive. My wife has her idees; an' I'm afraid she won't in some reespecks endorse our Wolfville ways. An', gents, if she should take a notion ag'in us, she's a force to make itse'f felt. Wharfore, in case you insists on carryin' out your *locoed* designs, you mustn't blame me yereafter if you finds that, in thus pitchin' camp in the dark, you've spread your blankets on a ant-hill.'

"'Mr. Cha'rman,' observes Boggs, who's been wearin' a troubled look, like somethin's preyin' on his mind, 'how would it be to begin by merely invitin' Abilene's wife to come yere on a visit? After what Abilene says, I deems it no more than proodence to manage a hold-out in our favor if we can.'

"'Gents,' breaks in Abilene, 'it shore seems onfair for all Wolfville to go pilin' itse'f up on me, when yere's Texas Thompson who more'n once mentions a wife of his who's livin' down Laredo way.'

"'Stop the deal!' cries Texas, as sharp as the crack of a pistol. 'I don't aim to go trackin' off into no explanations; I contents myse'f with announcin' that so shore as Wolfville says "Wife" to me, I'll back for a corner an' pull a gun:' An' yere Texas certainly does look a heap grim.

"'Goin' to the amendment,' remarks Peets, ignorin' the outbreak of Texas, 'of Mister Boggs, that we asks Abilene's wife yere on a visit, let me say I cheerfully adopts the same. But nothin' niggardly, nothin' mean, mind you! Let Abilene invite his wife for say a year—let him do that, an' I guarantees the outcome. Once the lady stacks up ag'inst our daily game, an' triumphs through a deal or two, she'll never give us up. Mister Cha'rman, as I moves we adjourn to the Red Light, let me say I holds the present to be the dawnin' of a new era.'

"Boggs, on his way to the Red Light, lays b'ar to Tutt an' me, private, why he wears that harassed air doorin' the discussion.

"'It's because Peets is makin' the mistake of his life, explains Boggs. 'Nacherally, I couldn't onfold at the time, Abilene bein' thar; it ain't for me to go plowin' up no gent's feelin's, an' him settin' in hard luck. But, between us I've seen this yere matron, when I'm drivin' cattle up from Texas into Caldwell.'

"'What for a lookin' seraph is she?' asks Tutt.

"'Onderstand,' replies Boggs, 'I've allers held that no lady's ugly, an' I holds so now. I'm obleeged to confess, however, that Abilene's wife has a disadvantageous face. Her profile is too jagged—too much like the side view of a rip-saw.'

"'Some ladies,' says Tutt, him bein' a born optimist, 'makes up in style what they're shy on looks.'

"'I hates to close the door of hope,' returns Boggs, 'but I don't reckon, Dave, your reemark goes as to Abilene's wife. Style ain't her long suite no more'n looks; the trooth is she dresses kind o' plain. The time I sees her, the waist of her frock's made out of a flour sack; I knows, because it says on it in bloo letters, "Rose of the Walnut Valley. XXX. Fifty pounds," bein' the brand we uses in our chuck wagon.'

"It's enough to wring tears from a Apache, the way Abilene resigns himse'f to be reyoonited with his fam'ly. Jest as I knows of a hoss-thief person, who's bein' swung off by the stranglers, fittin' the lariat to his own neck an' b'arin' a he'pin' hand at his own lynchin', so Abilene sends his wife the message to come on. She answers back she'll be with us in a month; wharupon everybody dons a expectant look, like somethin' thrillin' is on its

way—that is, everybody except Abilene who is melancholly, an' Texas who is hostile.

"Texas, who's more or less loser in a wedded way himse'f, cannot reepress his feelin's of contempt for what's goin' on. 'If that Abilene,' says Texas, 'possesses the spunk of horned toads, he'd shore get a brace of guns an' give this band of marplots a battle.'

"Peets grows as cocky an' confident as a dozen jaybirds. 'It's allers that way, Sam,' he says to Enright, payin' himse'f a compliment; 'a gent's cleverest thoughts comes when he's workin' for public good.'

"'This yere hand ain't played out, Doc,' returns Enright; an' while his manner is soft an' easy, thar's in it the flicker of a warnin'.

"The eeventful day draws round; Abilene goes out on the trail a piece to meet his wife, an' sort o' break the effect. When the stage swings into the post-office, the entire outfit is thar to start Abilene's wife out with good impressions. Excuse me shudderin' some; but she's shore a iron-visaged heroine!

"As Abilene he'ps her out of the coach, which feat he pulls off like he's handlin' a box of dynamite, Peets steps for'ard an' takes off his hat.

"'Missis Davis, I believe?' he says.

"Whoever is this yere inebriated loafer, Mister Davis?' deemands the lady, glarin' at Peets. 'No friend of yours, I hopes. He looks like he steals hosses for a livin'.' Then, to Peets, who's bowin' an' scrapin', tryin' to get p'lite action; 'Go way, you insultin' reprobate! Don't you das't to offer me no roodness!'

"'I don't aim none,' says Old Monte, as later we gathers about him, askin' questions, 'to go blowin' about the private affairs of my passengers, holdin' it onprofessional; but, not to go no further gents, I hopes never to taste licker ag'in if she don't give Abilene a lickin' over back in the canyon. That's straight; she makes him yelp like a coyote!'

"If ever a party is jestified of eevents it's Abilene. In less'n a week, that wife we imports for him has Wolfville walkin' in a circle. Thar ain't a gent among us who's got strength of char'cter enough, to even stay in the street when she shows up. The whole town goes into hidin'. Puttin' it the mildest, she's a menace to a free people. She swoops on a poker game, into which Abilene is settin'; an', although he's ahead at the time, she confiscates a pot of over ninety dollars that's in the center, besides takin' what money's loose in front of Boggs an' Jack Moore, claimin' the same as havin' been wrested from Abilene by venal practices. She lands in the Red Light one ca'm afternoon, flourishin' a axe, an' informs Black Jack she'll wreck the joint if ever she smells rum on Abilene ag'in. At this, the boys in their despair, begins sayin' things about Peets; besides eyin' him mighty baleful. Folks is seen to drink alone; which, speakin' from standp'ints of public peace, is a worst possible sign.

"Peets grows indignant; but he can't formyoolate no plans. 'The idee of this outfit of prairie dogs blamin' me!' he says, when him an' Enright's sadly talkin' things over. 'This is what I gets for rushin' to the rescoo of Wolfville!'

"'Doc,' returns Enright, slow an' solemn, 'you knows me. I'd stand up a'gin the iron for you; an' even now, if worst falls, I means to perish with you. None the less, I cannot pretend amazement at the boys layin' their troubles to your door. As a squar' man, with a fairly balanced mind, I'm bound to admit the boys is right. Now I don't say the camp feels what you'd call reesentful, Doc; it's more like they're mournin' over a day that's gone an' a peace you overthrows. An' yet you knows what hoomanity is, when rendered desp'rate by burdens more'n it can b'ar. I'm the last gent to go determinin' what's best for other gents to do, but you an' me is old friends; an' so, as a warnin' from a source that means you well, let me say that, onder the circumstances, an' rememberin' how we live in a day of lariats an' windmills, if I stood in your moccasins, Doc, either me or that maraudin' lady you introdooces yere, would leave town without deelay.'

"Peets couldn't be more impressed if all inadvertent five aces deevelops in one deal. An' let me observe it's beautiful to see him begin the round-up of his stampeded pop'larity. Peets is allers great, but never so great as when the shadow of Abilene's wife lays over him an' Wolfville like a blight.

"Followin' Enright's forebodin's, Peets holds a secret conference with Abilene out back o' the corral. Later he reports to Enright.

"'I reckon, Sam,' he says, knittin' his brows thoughtful, 'I've cut a trail that ought to lead us out.'

"'I shore trusts as much,' returns Enright. 'As

eevents are headin', I sees nothin' for it but to adjourn Wolfville *sine die.*'

"'This yere's the prop'sition,' goes on Peets. 'Thar's a rich an' sickly Caldwell aunt; also thar's a doctor. Abilene's done give me the names of both. I'm no Elijah, but I now foresees that Abilene's wife is goin' to get a message from said physician, sayin' the rich aunt is cashin' in, and to come a-runnin'.

"'But Doc,' reemonstrates Enright, 'do you-all reegyard it as on the squar' to go deloodin' this lady about a dyin' aunt, who most likely is up an' hustlin'?'

"'Sam,' says Peets, 'sech egreegious queries makes me tired. You should not forget that se'f-preservation, as a law of nacher, reefers to commoonities as much as men.'

"Boggs saddles the best pony in the corral, an' goes dashin' off for Tucson; next day he comes dashin' back. He b'ars a telegram for Abilene's wife; an' whether it's troo or no, at least it's convincin'. Next sun-up, by speshul buckboard, that reemarkable lady leaves for the East, castin' as she goes a sneerin' look at us, as we peeks from the Red Light's winders.

"The joyful dust of her departure hasn't settled, before Wolfville embarks in a celebration, so copious an' so exhaustive, it leaves the Red Light crippled, ontil it freights in a fresh stock. Peets, so lately the objeck of public anger, is now the public hero.

"'But you suppresses the facts, Abilene,' says Tutt, addressin' that husband where he's tankin' up, 'when you deescribes that treemenjus he'pmeet of yours as

simply "uppish." In view of what I now knows, "uppish" ain't a two spot.'

"'It's with no purpose, Abilene,' observes Peets, as he fills afresh his glass, 'to discourage one whom I sympathizes with as a onforchoonate an' reespects as a dead game gent, that I yereby invites the entire pop'lation to j'ine me over Wolfville's escape from your wife. An' all informal though this assemblage be, I offers the hope that this, the second of August, the date when the lady allooded to pulls her awful freight, continyoo an' reemain forever a day of annyool thanksgivin' in this camp.'

"Abilene seeks out Texas, an' extends his hand. 'Texas,' he says, 'it's shore low an' onmanly in me to try an' drag you into misery sim'lar to my own. It's done onder torture, Texas; an' because, as some poet sharp says some'ers, "Misery loves company."'

"'Well,' returns Texas plenty sullen, an' takin' the out-stretched hand sort o' slow, 'while, after sech exhibitions of weak selfishness as you-all puts up, I can't say I'll regyard you as clean strain, I don't say I won't forgive you none. Moreover, I shall look upon the eepisode as a cloud not altogether without a silver linin', if it serves to teach some headlong sports'—yere he looks hard at Peets an' Enright—'to stand paws-off, lettin' well enough alone, should they in footure find a husband an' wife livin' happily an' peacefully apart.'"

CHAPTER XI

JAYBIRD HORNE

AS to the size of that bundle Peets inherits," remarked the Old Cattleman, with the painstaking manner of one who would like to be accurate if he could—"as to the actooal size of that bundle, I never has preecise information. Peets himse'f sheds no direct light on it, an' nacherally I don't go proselytin' 'round askin' him questions, bein' too well raised by my folks. Boggs says once, in talkin' about it, that it's big enough to choke a cow; which statement, while calk'lated to excite admiration, don't go into deetails sufficient to jestify a figger. The clostest any gent ever comes to puttin' it down, book-keep fashion, is Enright, who allows it's fifty thousand dollars. That's a big pot of money, fifty thousand is, an' if you-all don't mind I reckon I'll ring for the licker. The mention of sech giant sums shore leaves my mouth as dry as a covered bridge.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" repeated the old gentleman, after he had been refreshed. Then, musingly: "I recalls the first big money I ever rounds up; which it's a roll of ten thousand. I ain't likely to forget the sensation none. For the first week I thought that ten thousand was a million dollars; after that I simply knowed

it was. How do I make it? Well, that's neither yere nor thar. Besides, a gent can't tell two stories at once, more'n a dog can chase two rabbits at once; wharfore, let's stick to the fifty thousand Peets' inherits that time.

"An' yet, to be c'rrect, it ain't a inheritance, emanatin' as it does from folks who's no kin of Peets'. It's not exackly what I'd call a donation neither; it's more like a pick-up, an' sort o' reeverts to Peets as the legit'mate froots of his eddicational bow an' spear. You frequent hears me mention how Peets is that wise he vis'bly uplifts the mental average of Arizona. This time he proves it; an' it's for that reason I'm allers speshul glad the play comes off. It's refreshin', as markin' the troo valyoo of science, to have a eddicated sport like Peets up an' make a killin', by merely knowin' things at what book-sharps call the croocial moment.

"It's the Deacon who's the instrooment seelected by Fate to confer on Peets that treasure; none the less the story, told proper, begins off to one side, with a malignant, p'isenous form of hooman varmint, who signs the books as Jaybird Horne. Likewise, the yarn possesses other elements of disj'intedness, doo to its bein' troo. Lies allers flies straight as arrers towards whatever they're aimed at, an' either misses or hurts or kills as the case may be. Trooth is different a whole lot. It's more apt to go wanderin' an' squanderin' an' zigzagin' all over the map, like a pony with its bridle off. An' for causes obv'ous: Lies is artificial, an' framed up for a purpose. As ag'inst this, trooth is nacheral, an' in its 'nitial appearance at least, never has no axe to grind. Which if

you'll only stop an' think, you'll see that this yere must be so.

"The commencement of things then is when that outcast Jaybird, ridin' a pinto pony an' hailin' from Lordsburg, comes bulgin' into camp. He makes a more or less mem'rable deboo; for a Red Dog loonatic called Curly Simpson, who's projectin' 'round Wolfville at the time, pulls his six-shooter, an' takes to cuttin' the dust about Jaybird's moccasins, as soon as ever he hits the ground.

"'I'm feelin' deepressed an' low,' explains Curly that a-way, 'an' if you'll kindly dance a little, it may serve to cheer me up.'

"As though willin' to yoomer Curly, this Jaybird shore does jump high an' sprightly, like a trant'ler; wharupon Curly gets pleased with his agil'ty, to that degree he cracks off all six loads like the rollin' of a drum. When Curly's final cartridge is gone an' he's plumb inokyoous, Jaybird, assoomin' a rattlesnake grin, prodooces a derringer an' puts a bullet through his foot.

"'It 'ud be your locoed head,' says Jaybird, 'only most likely sech feats involves me with the stranglers, for which I ain't got time. Likewise, when next you inaug'rates a *baile* of this deescription, either pack a second gun, or don't become so lib'rally profoose as to wholly empty the one you has. You sees yourse'f that either you ought to have saved your last cartridge, as a reeserve ag'inst the onexpected, or been wearin' another pistol so's to be ready, when called on, to back your crazy play. My own notion, private, is to allers have the second gun,

as bein' better form. No gent, without sacrificin' his standin', can permit his wardrobe to bog down to where he ain't got a change of guns.'

"Inasmuch as this eepisode comes off in front of the post-office, which is the next edifice to the Red Light, most of us is thar. When Jaybird finishes his oration, Enright, who's strong suit is bein' friendly to strangers an' makin' 'em feel at home, explains that Wolfville don't claim to be reespons'ble for Curly, him hailin' from Red Dog.

"'An' I certainly hopes,' says Enright, 'that, onder the circumstance, Curly's capers won't leave no sense of annoyance, nor op'rate with you to queer the town.'

"'None whatever!' returns Jaybird, mighty gala. Then, to all of us: 'Gents, my name's Horne—Jaybird Horne; an' I makes no doubts but when this Curly Red Dog person gets acquainted with me, he'll reespect me an' walk 'round me like I'm a swamp.'

"Curly is freighted over to Red Dog on a buckboard, by virchoo of his game foot; an' Enright closes the incident by allowin' he's glad he gets it, as a lesson ag'inst bein' so inordinate an' plumb reedundant with his gun.

"'Leastwise,' says Enright, in concloosion, 'I don't want Curly to come pirootin' over to Wolfville, givin' rein to his witless activities no more.'

"'Let's go into yon s'loon,' returns Jaybird, indicatin' the Red Light, 'an' forget it over a bowl of snake-water. Neither do I mind admittin', gents, seein' I'm feelin' some languid myse'f when I rides in, how that little gun-

play, so far from irritatin', reelly relieves me an' falls in nice with my moods.'

"With the start he makes, if Jaybird has the orig'nal roodiments of a white man in him, he might have climbed to what heights he chooses in public esteem. Wolfville is generous to the p'int of bein' a proverb. It has its tol'rant rooles. You comes to Wolfville; an' it's as though you're beginnin' life anoo. Your past is as nothin' to that hamlet. It begins with you as you steps from the stage. It don't ask your name; it asks 'What may we call you?' an' leaves you, as a proodent gent, to pick out what title is best adapted to your needs. As you go romancin' along from day to day, it watches you; an' final, it endorses you or lynches you as seems jest an' mete. Which I've said all this yere before.

"Bein' moved up into commoonal fellowship, your Wolfville foocher is asshored. Should you go broke, it stakes you; should you marry, it shakes a festive laig at the weddin'; should a papoose be born to call you 'Daddy,' it gets drunk with you; should you fall sick, it sets up with you. Die? Shore, if you dies, it confers on you a hon'rable sepulcher on Boot Hill, an' everybody attends the obsequies—that is everybody who's out of jail. You notes, tharfore, that Jaybird's got the local makin' or breakin' of himse'f wholly in his own hands, an' can stand way up in the pictures if so inclined.

"That he ain't so inclined none, cuts less of a figger in Jaybird's case perhaps, since it's plain from the jump he don't aim to remain. However, in them few days he does stay, he shore creates a black impression.

"An' at that I figgers it's more his atmosphere than what he does. He's plenty reepellant, is this Jaybird outlaw, an' you-all can smell villainy off him same as you smells fire in a house. Physic'ly he's small an' wiry, with bow-laigs from livin' a heap in the saddle. His eyes is small an' has a weaselish look, same as belongs to that egg-suckin' hen-huntin' breed of animals who can see in the dark.

"Most of all, however, it's Jaybird's face that's ag'inst him. For one thing, it peters out into one of them little chins, sharp an' bony at the p'int, broad at the corners of the jaw, like the jaws of snakes of p'isen sort—the chin of a murderer rather than a killer—crooel, skulkin', savage! No discreet gent, after seein' it, would think of takin' off his guns while Jaybird's hankerin' 'round.

"This Jaybird has one redeemin' trait; he's a born gun sharp. Shore! he's among the soonest prop'sitions, when he reaches for a six-shooter, I ever gets ag'inst. Not that I encounters him none lethal; barrin' the foot eepisode, wharin Curly quits loser, he don't offer to shed no blood in Wolfville on that earlier occasion of his trackin' in.

"It's over in Chihuahua, which is that fragment of the Wolfville body pol'tic where the Mexicans herd, that I has a chance of countin' up Jaybird's gun-play. This is what he does;—an' I allers imagines he does it to fix himse'f respectful upon the Greaser mind. He picks up six chips off the lay-out of a saddle-colored party who's dealin' monte, an' tosses 'em up in the air. They

spreads out, an' hangs for a moment like six blots ag'inst the sky. That's all Jaybird reequires. As he tosses up the chips, his hand goes to his gun; it's 'bang! bang! bang! bang! bang! bang!' faster than you-all can count, an' when them chips hits the ground ag'in they're in dust an' little pieces.

"Which I witnesses some swift clean gun playin' from time to time, but these yere performances of Jaybird is ondoubted the bloo ribbon outburst of 'em all. Cherokee, who's himse'f a pastmaster with a Colt's-45, gives it out that, for suddenness an' ackeracy, he himse'f don't stand no more chance with Jaybird than a pa'r of treys in a jack-pot after the draw. That's straight; Jaybird, personal, shore does possess a genius for firearms.

"Throughout the ten days Jaybird sojourns in our midst, he don't do nothin' much. He ain't what you'd call a drinker none, while at poker an' farobank he's even more sparin'. In talk, he don't wax over-commoonicative, an', if he beetrays pecooliarities, it's in the way he seems allers to be lookin' for some gent onknown. Not that he goes spyin' about open an' apparent, or takes to overtly rummagin' up the camp. Still it's as plain as printed books he's on some gent's trail. It's this yere hunt for that onknown which takes him over into Chihuahua, the time he busts them monte chips. Hunt as he may, however, Jaybird don't find his man; an' one mornin' he flings the hull onto his little pinto hoss, an' hits the trail for the no'th like he's satisfied he's been dubbin' 'round on a dead kyard.

"Folks in Arizona is so migratory that strangers, in

their advents or departures, excites no remark. No one, tharfore, heeds the goin' of Jaybird, more'n perhaps to exper'ence relief, same as if some centipede or stingin' lizard's disappeared. Neither does the camp lift up its astonished gaze none, when, mebby it's a week later, the Deacon comes weavin' in.

"This yere Deacon boy breaks on me first across the supper table at the O. K. Restauraw; I notices him speshul because he's so plumb callow. His face is as smooth an' young as Faro Nell's; an' he's that innocent for looks, you're overwhelmned with wonder constant as to how he comes to be caperin' about in Arizona at all—Arizona as a region bein' some turgid.

"It's Boggs who names him the 'Deacon;' an', since his pinfeather innocence sort o' gives us a pray'r-meetin' impression, we-all trails in an' calls him the Deacon sim'lar. So far from resentin' said title, he not only answers to it, but acts pleased.

"An' yet, that air of he'pless innocence is a heap misleadin'. This Deacon boy is all the time a more deadly problem even than the Jaybird, an' owns a fitfuller Colt's. Which it goes to prove how deeloosive is mere looks that a-way, an' sets a philosophic gent to thinkin'. Laid side an' side, the egg of the eagle ain't in it with a goose egg; but jest the same it holds a eagle.

"The Deacon ain't been a day in town before Jaybird, with his pinto hoss, ag'in comes canterin' in. Not that thar's anythin' irreg'lar or myster'ous in sech return; it's tryin' to read the brands on what follows, which proves sech a puzzle to the pop'lar mind.

"Yere's how eevents takes to pilin' themselves up. It's well into the shank of the evenin', on the day Jaybird gets back, an' we're all a heap onbuckled an' reelaxed. Of a sudden, from some'ers out to the r'ar of Hamilton's dance hall, we hears a gun bark once—short an' sharp, like the single bark of a dog.

"'Better sa'nter over, Jack,' says Enright, glancin' up from his poker game to Jack Moore—'better sa'nter over an' take a look in. One shot that a-way sounds doobious; I've a notion some maverick's been put over the big jump.'

"Thar's a sentiment of oneasy cur'osity all 'round, which is sharpened when Jack returns, ridin' offishul herd on the Deacon.

"'It's this yearlin',' says Jack. 'Whatever do you-all reckon now he's done?'

"'Which I shore can't say none,' observes Enright, layin' down his kyards.

"'I should gamble not!' Jack retorts. 'I hopes I may be eaten by red ants, if this roothless kid ain't bumped off that Jaybird. The latter prince of pistol shooters is layin' out thar back of a mesquite bush, as dead as Joolius Caesar.'

"'Him down that Jaybird party!' exclaims Enright, plumb took aback. 'Jack, it ain't feas'ble! It don't lay in his yoothful moccasins!'

"'Ask him!' says Jack.

"'It's in se'f defence,' cuts in the Deacon. 'Jaybird goes for his gun, an' I simply beats him to it.'

"'Do you-all mean to test'fy,' remarks Enright, slow

an' p'inted, 'that this Jaybird commences hostil'ties, an' that you hives him after he takes to domineerin' at you with his Colt's?'

"'That's whatever,' replies the Deacon, a heap onshaken. 'An' as to Jaybird bein' sudden with his artillery, you don't want to forget I'm some abrupt myse'f.'

"Enright uplifts a reeprovin' hand. 'Stop,' he says. 'Son, this yere's onhinged you. Thar's gents present who witnesses former what that Jaybird could do. In the light of them exhibitions, I pronounces your statements preepost'rous. My advice is to say no more, but devote yourse'f to silent meditations ontil the stranglers is convened.'"

CHAPTER XII

THE HEIR OF THE BROKEN-O

THAT'S one of the excellent feachures about a vig'lance committee, a feachure wharin they lays over other triboonals. All onbiased, they comes together before the witnesses grow lookewarm or the facts turn cold. The time that Deacon boy sends Jaybird flutterin' into the infinite, minutes don't elapse before the committee calls itse'f to order in the Red Light. What portion of the Wolfville public ain't otherwise engaged, likewise assembles to listen an' look on.

"Among the last, an' a heap up to the front, is a ven'rable gent with a full-moon face, an' a white fringe of beard all round it like a frill. In spite of his looks, the same bein' genial an' benevolent, an' plumb deevoid of evil, thar's evidences onmistak'ble, in his rusty black surtout an' tall hat, that the ven'rable party is a law-wolf. None of us is shore; for it's only that evenin' Old Monte brings him in, an' we ain't had no chance as yet to feel him out personal. I'm thus elab'rate, since this aged cimarron develops into quite a figger subsequent, though at the go-off he lays mum an' dead, with nary move or word.

"When the committee's ready, Enright invites the Deacon to onfold.

"'Which I already lays b'ar the facts,' responds the Deacon. 'I'm in the dance hall virchoously disportin' myse'f in a quadrille, the same bein' then an' thar pulled off to the strains of *Sandy Land.* The last call has jest been given, "All prom'nade to the bar!" when the floor manager signs it up to me that my cousin Jaybird wants to see me out back.'

"'Your cousin!' says Enright.

"'Shore; this Jaybird's my cousin; leastwise my half cousin, his pap an' mine bein' half brothers that a-way.'

"'Quite right!' breaks in the moon-faced old law-wolf, who's posted in the public foreground, payin' interested heed. 'The lad's quite c'rrect, gents; their paps was half brothers like he states.'

"'Whoever is this disturbin' old person?' demands Enright, some shocked.

"'He's a nov'lty to me,' returns the Deacon, as much amazed as Enright.

"'Who 'm I?' says the moon-faced gent, in a protestin' tone. 'Why I'm Jedge Bailey of the Austin bar, incident'ly counsel for the Broken-O ranch. Also I has business, pressin' an' private, with this yere culprit.'

"'Which the stranglers,' says Jack, layin' a hand on the moon-faced party, 'has prior claims; an', onless you reestrains your troublesome vivac'ty so as not to interrupt that arm of jestice, I'll certainly have to lead you outside an' side-line you a lot ontil the Deacon's guilt is declar'd.'

"'No offence, gents,' says the moon-faced person, mighty apol'getic. 'Most likely later, you'll invite me to be heard.'

"'Which if you-all knows anythin' worth hearin',' observes Enright, 'it's a cinch we shall.' Then, wheelin' on the Deacon ag'in, he remarks: 'Proceed with them rev'lations.'

"'Thar's mighty little more to tell,' says the Deacon. 'Nacherally, I goes cavortin' out to meet my rel'tive. Not that we've been sech chums, neither—him layin' over me for age by consider'ble. Prior to this, I ain't seen my Jaybird cousin but once, for closin' on three years, countin' from last spring's round up, an' then our interview is mighty brief. However, when I meets him to-night, thar's no mis-readin' the look on his face; he shore means killin'. He's standin' jest inside the outer rim of light from the r'ar winders of the dance hall, an' the instant I appears he's got me covered. Thar's no time for salyootations; an', bein' a nervous highstrung sport myse'f, about the time Jaybird covers me I covers him. If anythin', bein' defter, I shades his play a trifle, an'—as I says prior—beats him to it. Thar, gents, you've got it; I gives you the onmuzzled trooth.'

"'About you-all bein' sech a flash-light artist with a gun,' observes Jack Moore: 'S'ppose you gives this convocation a spec'men of your handiwork.'

"Jack's been holdin' the Deacon's belt an' weepon, havin' secoored 'em at the start. Removin' the five cartridges that's left, he presents the Deacon with his empty armament.

"'Belt that piece of iron on yourse'f,' says Jack, 'an', as Enright gives the word, see if you gets the drop on me.'

"The Deacon smiles his smile of onsullied innocence,

an' buckles on the Colt's. Enright counts 'one-two-three!' Thar's nothin' like it! Lightnin' hangs fire by compar'son! The Deacon's hand moves so quick it baffles the committee, an' he gets the cold muzzle on Jack, before that exec'tive so much as loosens his own gun in its scabbard.

"'That's s'fficient,' says Jack, as he reclaims the Deacon's pistol; 'thar shore don't seem no elements of ondoo delib'ration about your work.'

"'But why,' demands Enright, 'should this Jaybird homicide seek to down you—you his cousin? Whatever is his motive?'

"'That's too many for me,' returns the Deacon. 'However, one thing I knows is that over in Shakespear, on said recent one occasion I crosses up with him since I leaves the Brazos, he certainly does make some hostile motions. That time, too, I has my eye on him, however; an' inasmuch as he onderstands all about me bein' some veheement with a gun myse'f, he refrains. Ropin' round for his reasons in gunnin' for me, it may be thar's money in my rubbin' out. To be wholly frank, gents, I ain't none certain you-all couldn't borry ten thousand dollars on my skelp right now, back on the Brazos.'

"'Folks,' breaks in the moon-faced gent ag'in, 'if you'll permit, I reckon I can eloocidate a heap.'

"'Excoose me!' interrupts Jack; 'I sincerely regrets bein' obleeged to buffalo a party of your ven'rable years, but you forces my hand by this onlicensed boisterousness.'

"Jack's on the verge of puttin' the moon-faced gent into the street, when Enright bids him deesist. 'Go on,'

says Enright to the moon-faced gent. 'Whatever's this eloocidation you allows you're equal to?'

"'As I mentions former,' returns the moon-faced gent, 'I'm Jedge Bailey, counsel of the Broken-O, the same bein' the ranch of the late Virge Horne. Which you-all may have heard of old Horne, gents; they called him "Nine-notch Virge," him havin' downed nine. But to get back: I've come invadin' into these regions, on the trail of the said Virge Horne's heir an' laigatee, bein' the yooth now yere on trial. Also I desires to add that his cognomen is not "the Deacon," but Houston Horne. His pap cashin' in leaves him, as he stands yere, sole proprietor of the Broken-O herds; which are e-normous.'

"'How e-normous?' asks Boggs, who's allers caught by any mention of cattle.

"'How e-normous?' repeats the moon-faced gent. 'The Broken-O gets its runnin' irons onto nine thousand calves last spring.'

"'Nine thousand calves!' says Boggs. 'That means forty-five thousand head of cattle on the range. Texas' —yere he appeals to Texas Thompson—'what's the valyoo of cattle on the Brazos?'

"'All I saveys,' says Texas, 'is that when my Laredo wife gets her divorce, they rounds up two hundred head of mine, an' sells 'em at public vandoo—to pay costs an' al'mony—for six thousand dollars.'

"'Then this yere Broken-O outfit,' observes Boggs, 'ought to beat a million dollars!'

"'Come, gents,' breaks in Enright, rappin' for attention, 'this ain't no inquiry as to the market price of steers.'

Then, to the moon-faced gent: 'What you tells is not without interest; but them eloocidations you promises ought to level themselves at oncoverin' what motives this Jaybird sport could have for wipin' out the Deacon. Onless deceased is locoed, I certainly sees no cause for him carryin' on like the Deacon deescribes. I'm free to remark that this Deacon boy's tale, of how his Jaybird cousin tries to bushwack him, looks plenty gauzey.'

"'As to the Jaybird's motives,' resoomes the moon-faced gent, 'I'm comin' to 'em. An' when I names 'em, a black b'ar of your years an' sagacity will grasp 'em plumb instanter. Seein' him an' the Deacon—I accepts your name for the latter yooth—is all the reelations old Virge Horne has, in case of the Deacon's gettin' wiped out, it's up to that Jaybird murderer, as next of kin, to inherit the Broken-O. Likewise, I now ree'lizes the preecise murderin' play the latter bandit has in felon mind. He's missin' from the Brazos country, the moment the drug sharps gives it out that Virge Horne's goin' to pass in his chips; an', in view of what's took place, I makes no doubt his design, that a-way, is to bootcher the rightful heir, an' cl'ar a bloody path for himse'f to the estate. Gents'—an' yere old moon-face acts like he's on the brink of a set speech—' gents, this is shore a romance!'

"'Romance, yes,' interjects Enright; 'an' yet thar's a corner or two into which I trusts you'll shed a ray of light. How comes it, you bein' so thick with his dad, that this yere Deacon yooth don't know you none? Also, whyever ain't he home on the Brazos, instead of surgin' 'round yere in Arizona where he don't belong?'

"'As to them primary inquiries,' replies the moon-faced gent, 'he don't know me none because he never sees me none. I lives miles away from the Broken-O, in Austin; moreover, I don't get hooked up with Virge Horne as counsel, ontil after this wanderin' heir vamoses his old man's ranch. Concernin' this Deacon's reasons for thus abandonin' the paternal camp-fire, I leaves you to put them questions to him. If it's to be told, he's the party to tell it, not me.'

"'Bein' by nacher frank an' open,' speaks up the Deacon, 'I shore don't hesitate to say why I leaves home, reservin' nothin' back. I'm goin' on sixteen years at the time, an' as a natif of Texas I boasts a haughty sperit. Thar's a right smart sprinklin' of Mexicans back on the Brazos, an' of course we-all Americans draws lines of social sep'ration. Among other matters, the boys has sep'rate swimmin' holes, one for us an' one for the Mexican yooth. One mornin' I goes down to lave myse'f a lot, an' I leaves you to jedge my chagrin, gents, when I finds the Caucasian hole alive with Greasers. By way of reemonstrance, I turns in an' proceeds to chunk 'em up, when all of a sudden about twenty of 'em swarms ashore an' starts to crawl my hump. Thar's no use talkin', them Greasers certainly does frale me good an' fervent! As soon as I can make the round trip, I gets back to the swimmin' hole from the ranch with a 10-gauge shotgun an' fifty buckshot cartridges. I'll not put no figger on how many I cuts off, but, you hear me! I plays even for the Alamo right thar. When the massacre's over, it strikes me the neighbors somehow may

find fault; some of 'em is mighty narrow, that a-way, an' they may say I overplays my hand. With this on my mind, I streaks it for Arizona, an' never does go near the Broken-O ag'in. The trooth is, I don't aim to go back now, onless I receives guarantees.'

"'Fear not!' puts in the moon-faced gent, reasshorin'ly; 'them Brazos neighbors long ago settles that what you does is nothin' worse than a boyish prank.'

"'Well,' resoomes Enright, some thoughtful, 'the sityooation don't offer that concloosive evidence we deemands before we stretches a gent. None the less I don't credit this Deacon boy's claims that the Jaybird pulls on him first. Thinkin' he observes s'spicious moves on the part of that deceased rel'tive, when he meets up with him over in Shakespear, the Deacon bein' called from the dance hall like he is, gets stampeded; an' tharupon he slaughters the onthinkin' Jaybird in his confoosion. Don't you regyard that as a s'lootion, Doc?'

"Peets has been oncommon silent doorin' the hearin', but at Enright's question he begins movin' up to the fore.

"'This Deacon boy,' says Peets, not replyin' to Enright direct, 'tells us that the Jaybird has him covered. Now I examines departed, an' the bullet that takes him from us goes in his right side, jest below the shoulder, an', traversin' the body, lodges in the heart—a wound that's fatal frequent. To science all things is plain, an' the trooth easy to run down. Gents, the facts at issoo ain't camped a minute ahead.'

"'Tharupon Peets prodooces one of them jim-crow deevices he calls a probe, an' enters upon experiments.

We-all holds our breath to watch. Thar it is, shore enough! When Jaybird's arm is extended, same as is a gent's when he goes to shoot, the bullet hole is clean an' oninterrupted. Put his arm down by his side as in times of peace, an' var'ous an' sundry muscles, slidin' themselves one across the other, closes the bullet hole up. The probe won't enter. Goin' to a deeduction, Peets gives his word as a medical sharp that the Deacon tells the trooth, an' corrals Jaybird after that brigand's in p'sition to wage war. That ends it; by direction of Enright we throws the Deacon loose, an' Jack Moore gives back his gun.

"'Tharby reestorin' your standin' as a cit'zen,' says Jack.

"'Which I'm glad the kyards comes out of the box as they does,' remarks Boggs, with a sigh of relief. 'The idee of hangin' a millionaire that a-way palls on me. Hangin' rich folks shore does go ag'in my grane!'

"'If a millionaire is guilty, why?' demands Texas Thompson, some severe. 'Thar ain't one jestice for the rich, an' another for the pore. For myse'f, I favors hangin' rich men. Rich men, speakin' gen'ral, comes to be a mighty sight like fat hawgs; as a roole they ain't no good to other people till they're dead.'

"'You may be right Texas,' returns Boggs; 'jest the same, when it gets down to hangin' a millionaire, them thoughts of all the fun he could have, blowin' in his bankroll, shore op'rates to stay my hand. Hangin' a pore man now don't affect me so much; it's easier, like as if you're puttin' some suff'rer out of his misery.'

"It's six months later when Peets receives a letter from the Deacon, said eepistle runnin' in these words:

"BROKEN-O RANCH,
"On the Brazos.

"MISTER PEETS, M. D.,

"DEAR SIR:—My old pap makes a will, an' leaves a leg'cy to Jaybird, as his nephy, that calls for five figgers to express. The balance of the Broken-O estate, the same bein' plenty rotund, he confers on me. The Jaybird's happily extinct, an' nacherally I inherits his share, thar existin' no one nearer of the Horne fam'ly. Havin' in mind my se'frespect, I firmly refooses to profit by said Jaybird's deemise, a stand which you as a high-strung' gent will jestify. An' yet somethin' must be done with Jaybird's share. Rememberin' what I owes to you-all, an' the noble science which you represents, I've deecided to onload it on you, an' yereby encloses a draft drawn ag'in the Austin bank for full amount. I remain,

"Yours trooly,
"HOUSTON HORNE."

"'What do you think yourse'f, Sam?' asks Peets. 'Would you accept said riches?'

"'Would I accept?' says Enright. 'Doc, sech questions sounds plumb childish!'

"And then what?" I asked, as the old gentleman rapped the ashes from his beloved briar root, preparatory to retiring for the night.

"Then what? My son, Wolfville's temperachoor, taken at normal, is high; but in the week which ensoos on the heels of that Broken-O laigacy to Peets, it's shore carried to altitoods compared to which the term 'timberline' sounds marshy."

CHAPTER XIII

THE ROSE OF WOLFVILLE

"HER real name is Sarah Jane McElleney," observed the old gentleman as we settled to our customary talk; "I knows, because Cherokee Hall says he sees her former over in Silver City, when he's temp'rarily turnin' faro-bank for that camp. Of course when Cherokee gives the lady's name, it's regyarded, to use the expression of Peets—who's shore the soonest sharp!—as 'res adjoodicata.' As a historian, Cherokee is freequent ackerate, sometimes peevish an' allers firm, an' to go dispootin' about his facts mighty likely leads to onhealthful complications. When she's in Silver City—accordin' to Cherokee—she's workin' in the Palace Emporium, sellin' two-dollar shirts for ten. Concernin' them prices, I can well believe it; for she's certainly the guilefullest sales-lady that ever slams furnishin' goods or wheedles a gent across a counter.

"It's Peets who hails her as the 'Rose of Wolfville;' for, aside from bein' the best eddicated gent in the Southwest, he's also the most poetic. Bein' she's as pretty as a heart flush, the camp adopts his deescriptif. Subsequently, we adheres to said title on account of the thorns. Which as an outfit we shore does prick our fingers on

the Rose; to say nothin' of 'Gene Stevens an' Eldorado Bob prickin' theirs speshul!

"These yere sev'ral happenin's I'm borderin' on, bobs up when Tutt an' Tucson Jennie's been married a year, an' that transcendent infant, Enright Peets Tutt, is mebby goin' on a month. An' I allers lays the part Peets takes in this embroglio, wharof the Rose is the bloomin' but onsatisfactory center, to the inflooence of little Enright Peets. Followin' the awful sityooation he precip'tates in bringin' on Abilene's wife that time, Peets gets mighty tame, an' conducts himse'f a heap proodent an' conserv'tive. It's the comin' of Tucson Jennie's baby which ag'in sets him to ghost-dancin'; for in his exhileration he feels, to the chubby extent of little Enright Peets, like Wolfville is on velvet, an' as a troo gambler he's for stickin' to the system which prodooces that infant, an' doublin' the stakes.

"It's some prob'ble, too, that when it comes to fomentin' wedlock for other people, Peets—like all doctors—is preematoorly prone, not to say profession'ly overeager that a-way. I says this of Peets advised; for Wolfville, in its domestic expressions, don't wholly jestify his onflaggin' zeal in cappin' wedlock to win.

"When it comes to provin' matrimony to be a onchallenged vict'ry, Wolfville don't go all one way. This is pecooliarly troo in the case of the Ruckers, the same, as a warnin', bein' onder our nose constant. Relyin', as we do an' must, on the O. K. Restauraw for our daily flapjacks an' salt hoss, Rucker's thralldom is necessar'ly a open page. Missis Rucker, while a lady possessed of a

multitood of esteemable virchoos, in her wifely attitood towards Rucker is plumb despotic; to sech degrees, in trooth, that no one blames him much when he goes limber-footin' off that time to j'ine the Apaches, an' throw a line of them savages between himse'f an' his domestic bliss. Shore, we rounds him up later, an' drags him back to Missis Rucker's arms; but sech steps is took on other grounds entire. However, to return to the Rose of Wolfville, whom we leaves bloomin' alone.

"Wolfville has no notice preev'ous of the comin' of the Rose. She deescends upon us like a fallin' star, an' goes to clerkin' in the New York Store. It shore shows that Armstrong, who owns said mart, knows his business; for the stampede to buy handkerchiefs an' b'iled shirts, after the Rose gets thar, is without preecedent in local commerce. Also it's a blow at the Red Light, which public reesort don't sell half the rum of yeretofore. I don't exaggerate; thar's never no sech prior rush of custom in the territory, as sets in ag'inst the New York Store after the Rose appears. I knows folks that never ontil then owns four shirts contemp'raneous, who instantly acquires forty.

"'Which it's the Rose's smile does it,' explains Boggs, who's gone broke on neckties an' sim'lar frivol'ties. 'She certainly does leer at a gent a heap tender, when he's buyin' things.'

"At that the Rose's amiability is wholly confined to business hours; when any of us cuts her trail outside, she's as formal as a fooneral, an' never as a roole notices our ex-

istence more'n if we're horned toads. Now an' then, to be shore, when some dead game gent takes off his sombrero, she bows; but the bow is as short an' cold as a winter's day. It's her system, I reckon. Meet her behind the counter, an' she's as warmly beamin' as the August sun at noon; cross up with her at the post-office, or Missis Rucker's, or in the street, an' icicles is feverish to her.

"The Rose has been breakin' trade records for Armstrong mebby it's a month, when Peets—excited, as stated, by the sight of little Enright Peets—begins agitatin' 'round about some gent marryin' her an' settlin' down.

"'Don't go ropin' at me none to assist, Doc,' reemonstrates Enright, to whom Peets is allowin' what a setback to Wolfville it is for the Rose to continyoo single that a-way; 'I don't figger I care for kyards in any more fam'ly-foundin' plays. That fool bluff we runs, in bringin' on Abilene's wife, lets me out complete. I never thinks of the eediotic plot we formyoolates that time, without goin' out doors to blush.'

"'You'll pardon me, Sam?' says Peets, plenty dignified, 'if I protests ag'in your pose of cool indiff'rence. Thar's a debt, let me reemind you, which you owes to Wolfville. Emigration, as a element of commoonal growth, is excellent up to a certain p'int; but all authorities on nation buildin' agrees that you-all can't put your swell bet on it. Folks is a heap too itinerant. They comes an' goes like the old woman's soap; they're yere to-day an' thar to-morrow. What Wolfville needs is

increases natif to the soil—same as that wonder of the centuries, little Enright Peets. Think whatever for a boast it would be, if Wolfville could p'int to a home-grown herd of children, big enough to stock a school! Marriage is the way to bring sech proud conditions to pass. Assoomin' the Rose to be linked in lovin' matrimony to some trusty sport like Dan yere, who shall say that, led along by the glorious example of Tutt an' Tucson Jennie, they won't go romancin' off in exploits sim'lar to little Enright Peets? Whatever do you say yourse'f, Dan?' concloods Peets turnin' to Boggs, who's been listenin' some impressed. 'What's the matter of you gettin' chips, pullin' a cha'r up to the sityooation, an', for the advancement of a Wolfville footure, winnin' out this Rose lady? Jest consider how, in sech eevents, we puts it all over Red Dog.'

"'Which we've got that deboshed hamlet jumpin' sideways as it is,' returns Boggs. 'As for me marryin' the Rose, while I'd shore admire to make the dulcet trip, it would be playin' it a heap too low down on any lady, to go sawin' off on her matrimonially, sech a long-horn as me. Now if I'm some cornfed tenderfoot, it would most likely be different a whole lot.'

"'Dan,' interjects Peets, 'this yere hoomility, while it does you credit, likewise does you wrong.'

"'But, Doc,' persists Boggs, 'I ain't seedentary enough for a husband. I've lived too much in the cow-camps, too little in a house. I knows my deefects; an', while I'm not oncap'ble of frauds, when it comes to goin' in on a cold collar an' deloodin' some innocent lady into leadin'

me to the altar, you bet it's a play too neefarious for my moral nacher.'

"'Dan,' warns Texas Thompson, who's drawn up in time to hear the last; 'don't you go leadin' no ladies to the altar. Ladies is a brace game. I never reeflects upon that Laredo wife of mine, who gets the divorce, but it shore gives me cold feet. It's the wise gent who, in this yere matter of wedlock, holds himse'f onwaverin'ly in abeyance.'

"'Texas,' reemonstrates Peets, 'sech herisies is plumb mortifyin' to your friends. Likewise they p'ints to a selfish narrowness on your part, that's far from doin' you credit. You're altogether illogical. You go pesterin' 'round a bee-tree, an' get all stung up a lot. An' then you passes the rest of your carpin' days, declar'in' thar's no honey in the world!'

"'Onderstand, gents all,' exclaims Texas, for, as backin' up Peets' reproaches, he notes disapproval in Enright's eye; 'onderstand, I ain't aimin' none to head Dan off. What I says is that, accordin' to my experience, matrimony works out a good deal like eatin' off the same plate with a grizzly b'ar. Sho'!'—an' Texas can't reepress a shudder—'I'd as soon think of pettin' a wolf! The mere idee brings on a attack of the fantods!'

"'Aside from any Wolfville interest,' observes Peets, disregyardin' the last remarks of Texas, whom he looks on as a hopeless pess'mist, 'I don't consider it's publicly safe for the Rose to go trackin' round without a husband. It's too much like havin' some onauthorized six-shooter lyin' 'round, loaded to the brim; it opens too wide a

chance for accidents. I'd sooner some gent would come meanderin' along an' own it a lot; in which case, if harm ensoos, we has a place to start from in fixin' reesponsibil'ties.'

"'Doc,' says Faro Nell, speakin' across the lay-out to Peets, for the talk comes off in the Red Light, while Cherokee is dealin' bank; 'why don't you cull this yere Rose yourse'f? What's the matter of thar bein' a Missis Peets?'

"'It wouldn't do at all, Nellie,' returns Peets, shakin' his head. 'I'm a medicine man; wedlock is plumb forbid by the ethics of my game.'

"Me bein' a bachelor," said the old gentleman, after pausing to re-light the briar-root, "ladies, if not a sealed book to me, at least is writ in a furrin' tongue; I can't make nothin' of 'em, an' never could. Wharfore, it's beyond me to go layin' b'ar the motives which onderlies the conduct of the Rose, from this time for'ard. All I can do is reelate what happens, in the order it deevelopes, an' leave it to you-all to read the brands on eevents as they troops by.

"Followin' the pow-wow reelated, Peets does nothin' in partic'lar. Not but what he has the will; only no openin' occurs to cut in for action. I reckons, also, that Enright an' Boggs layin' down on the game like they do, sort o' daunts him; to say nothin' of them loogoobrious reeflections of Texas. For all that, this yere enterprise of marryin' off the Rose don't go to sleep. Only it breaks forth in new an' onexpected forms.

"It's this a-way: 'Gene Stevens an' Eldorado Bob

are riders on Enright's Bar-B-8 ranch, an' belongs at one of his sign camps over by the Tres Hermanas. They're young, smooth, handsome boys, straight as lances, slim an' limber as panthers, an' to see either of 'em in the saddle is like hearin' a toone of music. Up to this yere eepock, they eats out o' the same bake-kettle, sleeps onder the same blankets, an' in all reespecks gets along together as peaceful an' friendly as two pups in a basket.

"One bright mornin', mebby it's a week after Peets makes that talk, these young an' boundin' sports rides into Wolfville. As they goes curvin' about, they gets simultaneous eyes on the Rose. Which it's the beginnin' of the end; from that moment their infatchooation is obv'ous. That lady simply goes over their ontried sensibil'ties like a landslide!

"Aimin' to remain for a day when they rides in, they stays a week; an' doorin' said period you can't drive 'em out o' the New York Store with a gun. Absolootely, they becomes sort o' spellbound about this Rose, to a degree where Enright begins to notice. Poss'bly, it's the boys over-drawin' their pay, months in advance, which first attracts Enright's attention. By that time, however, neglectful of Bar-B-8 interests utter, they've as stated been hankerin' round town for mighty nigh a week.

"Enright when he learns, is plumb scandalized. 'Whatever would you think, Doc!' says Enright; 'them two cimarrons ain't rode a mile of my lines for seven days! That means a shore hundred head of Bar-B-8 cattle has done drifted across into Mexico! You can

gamble them Greasers, over about Casa Grande, is havin' a beef picnic all right.'

"'Never mind,' observes Peets, a heap soothin'—Peets sees what's afoot from the jump, but don't say nothin' for fear Enright drives 'Gene an' Eldorado back on the range—'never mind, Sam; let 'em play around a while, until the Rose picks one of 'em out. It would shore be a crime ag'in the body pol'tic, to go sp'ilin' nuptials which I now perceives is not only certain but clost. Ain't it wonderful how, jest as I'm settin' down in despair, this yere marital trick begins to up an' turn itse'f?'"

CHAPTER XIV

THE ROSE'S THORNS

CLOSE-HERDED by Peets, who won't let any of us so much as bat a eye or wag a y'ear lest we disconcerts the love-makin', we-all lays mighty low an' quiet. The eyes of the camp is riveted on the Rose, to see when she commences to thaw; an' towards which gent. So far, it looks like 'Gene an' Eldorado is splittin' about even. Nacherally, with both of 'em hangin' 'round the New York Store from the time Armstrong onlocks the doors in the mornin' until he locks 'em up ag'in at night, they arrives at a closer acquaintance with the Rose than does the rest of us. However, that virgin, as between 'em, in no wise evinces partiality. If she capers over to the O. K. Restauraw for her noonday chuck with Eldorado, she prances back to the store ag'in with 'Gene; an' thar you be. The tangle shore does keep us shiftin' our stacks, an' guessin'.

"'Which I'll bet a hatful of bloo chips it's 'Gene,' says Boggs, banterin' Texas for a wager.

"'Not with me,' returns Texas, a heap solemn. 'I'm some heartless as a sport, but I'd no more spekyoolate on a gent gettin' married than on a gent gettin' lynched.'

"This lovin' see-saw between 'Gene an' Eldorado goes on for a fortnight, by which time they've ceased to

drink together, an' glowers plenty fierce when they meets.

"'The plot is thickenin',' says Peets, rubbin' his hands. 'In less'n another month that lady'll declar' herse'f.'

"'They'll take to shootin', them boys will, long e'er that,' says Enright. 'Which I don't so much mind them lovers abandonin' my cattle, Doc,' he continyoos, his manner plenty nervous; 'but I'm in hourly fear of 'em lowerin' their horns at one another. My y'ears is expectin' the crack of a Colt's-45 any minute!'

"'How would it be,' asks Jack Moore, 'for me, in my capac'ty as kettle tender for the stranglers, to denoode 'em of their hardware?'

"'That wouldn't seem preecisely the thing neither,' returns Enright. 'With the rest of us packin' our guns, it would shore appear invidious to go strippin' them boys of their bric-a-brac. Besides, Jack, bein' in love that a-way most likely makes 'em fretful, an' they'd t'ar into you for war. Which is what we're tryin' to dodge.'

"'I'm a fair jedge of bloodshed in its approach,' says Peets, 'an' I don't see no signs as yet. S'ppose we stands pat, an' keeps a sharp watch. At the first symptoms of trouble, we'll be down upon 'em like a passel of 'possums on a couple of persimmons. To move now would be to queer the play; whereas, if we gives the Rose time, it's a cinch she'll make up her mind.'

"'Well, I shore wishes she would!' reemarks Enright, plenty fervent. 'I certainly don't hone none to

have two of my best riders go to shootin' each other in two over this damsel.'

"'Thar ain't a chance!' reesponds Peets.

"'Doc,' breaks in Texas, dark an' savage; 'them coquettes revels in bein' the cause of bloodshed, an' regyards murder in the light of compliments.'

"'Reely Texas,' says Peets, his tones hard an' severe, 'you over-steps the bounds—even for a gent who's been made the victim of a lady's crooelty. This Rose ain't no coquette; her cirklin' in an' out about 'Gene an' Eldorado, first with one an' then the other, is nothin' more'n the gentle hesitancy of a dove about to 'light.'

"'That may be, Doc,' observes Enright; 'an' yet, I can't avoid wishin' she'd pick out her perch. Or, should she consider sech perch-pickin' as ongirlish, if this maiden would only up an' confide in some discreet gent private, as to which she'd ruther have, it might do. In sech case, we deevotes ourselves to gettin' the wrong boy out o' camp. Between us, Doc, havin' regyard to our p'sition in the commoonity, an' in the interests of peace an' to save life, I thinks it our dooty to approach her on that p'int.'

"'I ain't none shore but you're right,' returns Peets, sort o' ponderin'. 'Leastwise, for that an' sundry other reasons, I won't say I ain't in favor of smokin' her out. A little gentle interference might be the winnin' play; ladies likes to have their hands crowded. Sam, if you'll come with me an' back the game, I'll offer the Rose her choice between 'Gene an' Eldorado right now. That's it; we'll shore make her take to a tree or go into a

hole! The Rose, too, will be grateful for us bringin' things to a head; while she'll blush, an' mebby pout some, she'll thank us in her heart.'

"Although Enright ain't none entranced with the su'gestion to go see the Rose at once, he believes the prospecks to be crit'cle, an' yields. Wharupon Peets an' him goes pirootin' off on their embassy of love an' peace —Peets, game as pheasants, in the lead. Boggs, who's allers plumb inquis'tive, follows teeterin' along in the r'ar to size up the play.

"This yere is how Boggs reports them proceedin's:

"'Peets opens,' says Boggs, 'an' offers a line of argyment about the rectitoode of his intentions, the same makin' no impressions as far as I can jedge. Then he deemands to know whichever she's goin' to tie down, 'Gene or Eldorado.

"'Thar's nothin' goin' on in the store at the time, an' the Rose is over on the grocery side, eatin' a ginger cookie. As the Doc is talkin' I can see her color mount, an' I half allows she's goin' to la'nch some pound weights, that's lyin' loose an' handy on the counter, at the Doc's head. She does have some sech idee, but puts it aside; final, she stands glarin' like a wronged lioness. You bet, gents, I wouldn't have been in them sports' moccasins for a herd of cattle!

"'While the Rose stands thar, glarin' an' pantin', Enright breaks in all soft an' persuasif. "What I fears, Miss," says he, "is that these yere boys'll take to pawin' for trouble with each other. You-all shore don't want the young male persons of this village to go shootin'

each other all up?" The Rose still stands thar sayin' nothin' but lookin' that f'rocious she could eat the sights off a Winchester. "Which if you reely knows these yooths, Miss," goes on Enright, "an' how their hearts is as soft that a-way as two goose-ha'r pillows, you'd certainly pity 'em a lot."

"'It's then,' continyoos Boggs, 'I sees the Rose beginnin' to pull herse'f together for a verbal spring. Which I won't attempt her words none; the burnin' eloquence of that gifted lady is beyond me! As a deebater she shore lays over a quartette of kings an' a ace! An' say! the way she does t'ar into the Doc an' Enright is a lesson to bobcats! I don't overstate, gents, when I says that she gets enough of their hides to make a saddle cover. At the close, she stamps her foot like a buck antelope; an' all with a proud high look that reeminds me a mighty sight of a goddess. It's the only time I ever sees the Doc wholly discouraged. As for Enright, I feels sorry for the old silver-tip, he's that abashed.'

"We-all has to content ourselves with Boggs' story, for Enright an' Peets, when they comes weavin' back to the Red Light, don't say nothin'. They jest stands at the bar, consoomin' Old Jordan with a preeockepied air, like they're mentally countin' up the pot to see who's shy.

"Finally it's Enright who speaks: 'Which I begins to wonder less'n less,' says he, 'at the morose attitoodes of Texas to'ards ladies.'

"'That Rose is some fiery, an' that's a fact!' reemarks Peets musingly.

"Sayin' which, the two closes up as mum an' moote as a basket of clams. Their looks is enough, though—bein' that glum they'd frighten children or sour milk.

"It's second drink time in the evenin', an' a soft quiet, broken only by the muffled flutter of a stack of chips, preevails. We're most of us in the Red Light, when all of a sudden the brisk tones of 'Gene breaks on the y'ear.

"'Which I've nothin',' says he, 'but my love an' my gun; the one's for the Rose, an' t'other's for reevenge. Eldorado, it's up to you to fill your hand!'

"The artillery starts to bark an' buck-jump with the last word, an' riots on for about four shots a side. Bein' not without experience, those of us who ain't involved crouches behind bar'ls an' ducks down back of the counter, so's to be out of the way of the flyin' lead. Thar ain't much resk; with two cool hands like 'Gene an' Eldorado workin' the batteries, we-all is safe enough.

"When the shootin's over, we begins to count up the casyooalties. We gropes about in the smoke an' finds 'Gene, hit some hard in the shoulder; an' next we locates Eldorado rollin' 'round on the floor, a mighty commodious hole in his side. Peets, who accompanies 'em to Missis Rucker's to bandage 'em an' bed 'em down, gives it as his professional opinion later that they'll live; which said assoorance rolls a stone from off our apprehensions.

"'An' yet,' says Enright, drawin' a deep breath, 'yere we be, an' nothin' adjusted! Thar's all this shootin' an' blood-lettin', an' the camp all torn up, an' most

likely the whole deal to go over ag'in! That's one of the disturbin' elements, Doc, about an even break.'

"It's the next day when a fresh feachure is added to the sityooation; the Rose, harnessed in her best bib an' tucker, takes the stage for Tucson. As she departs, she never expresses the least solic'tood touchin' them lovers lyin' all shot up.

"'An' some mavericks thinks ladies is tender!' comments Texas.

"'You don't onderstand, Texas!' says Peets, almost losin' his temper. 'With both boys creased, it wouldn't be delicate for the Rose to go expressin' preferences. Wait till she gets back; then if she don't go driftin' round the neck of whichever is her sweetheart, I'm a Mexican!'

"'Shore!' exclaims Boggs; 'I strings my money with the Doc's! It's perfec'ly cl'ar to me, that the Rose has only gone squanderin' off to pick out her trooseau. I hopes she makes it bloo; bloo's my fav'rite tint.'

"Armstrong, in reesponse to pop'lar eagerness, allows that the Rose will be back in a month.

"'By which period,' says Peets, 'I'll have them cavaliers on their pins, ready for the Rose to make her seelections. You'll see, Sam'—addressin' Enright, who's takin' a morbid view—'that this yere'll come winner on the turn.'

"Next evenin' about sundown, Old Monte, wropped in the yoosual dust cloud, is seen bringin' in the stage on the lope.

"'The same bein' a bad omen,' declar's Boggs.

'Whenever that old drunkard's the b'arer of bad news, he allers hurries.'

"'It's all over!' shouts Old Monte, never waitin' to kick free the mail bags or tumble off the express box. 'That Rose girl, the instant the stage stops last night in front of the Oriental S'loon, grabs off a Tucson sport who's lyin' in wait for her, an' sashays off to be married. Gents, I couldn't believe my eyes! It's plumb troo, however; an' the barkeep at the Oriental gives me his word that said outcast who gets her has been engaged to the Rose for months. Figger on my feelin's, when I reecalls how 'Gene an' Eldorado is lyin' he'pless, while their rights is bein' thus heartlessly trifled away! I'm for takin' the express shotgun, an' maimin' the preacher or mowin' down the bridegroom! But the Tucson marshal wouldn't have it, gents; he cuts in between me an' them two kidnappers an' stan's me off. I couldn't he'p it none; that Rose girl is lost to 'Gene an' Eldorado an' the rest of us for good!'

"At the finish, Old Monte gives a deeper groan than ever, an' havin' told his bad news, seizes on the affair to go on what Boggs calls a 'public drunk' to show how bad he feels.

"Thar's nothin' spoke for a while. Ever sober an' sympathetic, Black Jack makes a row of bottles the len'th of the Red Light counter; bein' a astoote barkeep, he saveys what the occasion reequires. At last Enright breaks the silence.

"'It looks, Doc,' says he, 'like the Rose has rung in a cold hand on us?'

"Peets don't reply, bein' tongue-tied of chagrin.

"'Which I has preemonitions from the go-off,' observes Texas, a heap pompous, 'that this yere Rose lady ain't on the level about them boys. But why preetend s'prise? It's nothin' more'n another instance of woman lovely woman!'

"'Whatever be you-all wolves howlin' about, I'd like for to ask?' puts in Faro Nell, who's assembled with the rest. 'I don't see nothin' wrong this Rose girl's done; an', bein' a girl myse'f, you bet I'm a jedge. When it comes to losin' her heart, she has a right to place her bets to suit herse'f, as Cherokee'll tell you; an' Wolfville, instead of grouchin' an' grumblin', ought to be proud to turn for her.'

"'Gents,' says Enright, pullin' himse'f together, 'the present is a profound instance of "out o' the mouths of babes an' sucklin's." Nell is right. The more I considers, the less I'm able to see where this Rose lady exceeds her rights. An' if she does, what can we-all do about it? —ladies is that ongovern'ble! By word of Armstrong, I onderstands the Rose will presently reeturn to us, an' make her home yere. Let us tharfore, for the honor of Wolfville, be prepared to whoop it up as she trails in with her prey. While she ain't preecisely pleased us none, an' would have come nearer to ticklin' us to death if she pitches on one of them pore wounded boys across the way, she most likely pleases herse'f—which is the next best chicken on the roost. The reeflection, too, should cheer us that, since she's goin' to pitch her household camp among us, the town's bound to be ahead on the

deal. Askin' every gent's pardon for so long a speech, which, however, considerin' how the hands has been runnin' may not prove in vain, I invites the onprejewdiced opinions of our friend, the Doc, on the subjecks involved.'

"'Sam, as yoosual, you've stated my feelin's to a ha'r,' responds Peets, who's by now recovered his aplomb. 'Onder all the circumstances, while perhaps the Rose does deal herse'f a hand from the bottom, I sees no real room for cavil. So confident am I tharof that, askin' all to yoonite with me, I yereby freights my glass to the Rose of Wolfville an' the tarrapin she's roped up.'"

CHAPTER XV

SANDY CARR, VIOLINIST

"DO you-all believe in ghosts?" asked the old gentleman one evening, the while cocking a questioning eye through the tobacco smoke. I replied, almost indignantly, with an emphatic negative. "No more do I," he returned thoughtfully—"no more do I. An' yet I've been afraid of 'em all my life.

"Not that I ever encounters a spook," he continued, after a moment's silence; "leastwise never but once. It's the ghost of Sandy Carr; an', you hear me! that specter shore terrifies Wolfville to a degree which leaves it as flat as a field of turnips. Boggs is scared speshul, an' it looks like his mind is onhinged for a time. Still he ain't so much to blame; for this yere wraith takes to chasin' him about personal, an' runs him for more'n a mile.

"It's this a-way: We-all likes Sandy a whole lot, an' Boggs, who's always took by sick folks an' ladies an' weak people gen'ral, likes him partic'lar. He's been with us quite a spell, Sandy has, an', bein' he's leadin' voylinist at Hamilton's dance hall, ockyoopies a front place in the camp's best social cirkles. Moreover, he's an *Americano:* and since the balance of them virchuosoes is Dutch, Sandy sort o' stands out. Enright knowed

Sandy's old pap back in Tennessee, an' that of itse'f puts him 'way up in the picture kyards.

"When Sandy makes his deboo among us, he allows it's on account of his lungs, him bein' behind the game, pulmonary. Doc Peets, however, scouts the idee. Peets goes all through Sandy with a lantern, an' gives it as his jedgment it's his heart.

"'Which I don't reckon it makes much difference neither,' says Sandy, mighty careless—for he's plumb resigned that a-way—'seein' either one of 'em's a center shot.'

"'Nonsense!' says Peets, who's for stiffenin' people's nerve. 'Thar ain't no more chance of you packin' in than of holdin' a royal flush.'

"That's what Peets imparts to Sandy; but he puts the rest of us on private, that Sandy, when it comes to livin', ain't got a look-in.

"'It may be to-morry,' says Peets; 'an' then ag'in it may be years. Soon or late, however, pore Sandy'll blink out like a candle.'

"'Which he gets it from his folks,' says Enright; 'Sandy's old man is plenty puny.'

"Bein' he's on what he deescribes as 'waitin' orders,' Sandy employs himse'f, as I states, fiddlin' in the dance hall. An' he's a shore genius when it comes to combinin' rosin, hoss-ha'r an' catgut, in what Colonel Steritt in the *Daily Coyote* calls 'a harmonious whole!' He'd lean back with his eyes shet, when the fit's on him, an' the wails an' sobs an' shrieks he'd lure from the bosom of that instrooment, would shore run a mountain lion

plumb off its natif heath. Thar's nothin' to it! At sech eepocks I holds with Boggs that Sandy, if he pleases, could play a fiddle with his feet.

"As the days runs into months, an' Sandy ain't took the big jump none as yet, we-all kind o' gives up lookin' for it; an', when it does come, it's in the nacher of a s'prize. Peets himse'f ain't thar at the time, bein' over to the Box-D outfit, tyin' down a cow-puncher who's busted his nigh hind laig. Not that Peets could have done nothin' if present; Sandy quits that quick, it's as if it's a Colt's–45.

"It's along towards the heel of the dance hall hunt that night when Sandy's took. The gray-bloo streaks of mornin' is comin' up over the Floridas, the last walse has been pulled off, an' Sandy's packin' his fiddle away in its box. He says somethin' that sounds afterward like he feels the finish ain't a foot away.

"'Looks a heap like a coffin!' he observes to Dave Tutt, an' p'intin' to the little old black fiddle-box. Then, as if a idee strikes him: 'Dave,' he remarks, 'if that last walse I jest scrapes off, turns out to be the shore enough last, tell the boys that Dan's to have Ole Bull yere.' Ole Bull's his fiddle. 'Dan,' he goes on, 'has been a heap good to me; an', while he ain't got no more moosic in him than a coyote, it'll do to remember me by.'

"That's what Sandy says; an' the next moment he comes slidin' from his perch as dead as Santa Ana.

"'An' you can bet the limit,' declar's Texas Thompson, as Tutt relates the eepisode, 'Sandy has preem'nitions. Shore, folks gets some mighty mystic hunches that a-way.

As the poet sharp observes, "Comin' eevents casts their shadows before." I has 'em myse'f. That time my Laredo wife swats me over the forehead with a dipper, I'm seized of a dozen preem'nitions all at once. Aside from what stars is yoosual on sech occasions, I sees her gettin' that divorce, an' sellin' up them steers at public vandoo for al'mony, an' the whole racket same as though it's in a vision. That's whatever! Gents, take it from me that, as Sandy stands thar tellin' Dave how Dan's to have his fiddle, he saveys Death's got the runnin' iron on him right then, brandin' him for the ranges eternal.'

"Boggs sheds tears when he's told, bein' as I explains freequent a mighty eemotional sport. Then he allows, to show his respect, that he'll set up with departed ontil he's ready to send over to Tucson. That last's the way Sandy himse'f framed it up. We finds a note to Enright sayin' that, while he ain't got nothin' ag'in Boot Hill as a place of sepulcher, if we-all don't mind he'd sooner be sent back to his folks.

"It's arranged that Sandy's to go p'intin' out for the East the next day, the same bein' as soon as we-all can get a box. Meanwhile, Boggs gives it out he aims as mourner in chief, to mount gyard over the remainder. Knowin' how plumb ha'r-hung Boggs' sens'bilities is, I can't say I regyards his resolootion about settin' up with Sandy as sagacious.

"Pendin' the box, we files Sandy away in his bed over to the O. K. House, where he belongs. Sandy's room, which is long an' narrow like a rope-walk, is in the second storey of the lean-to; an', since the bed is 'way yonder at

the far end, we-all hopes that Boggs, by settin' near the winder where he can look across to the Red Light an' see the boys, scuffles through the night in shape. Some of us would have offered to double-up in them vigils; but Boggs is so plumb sens'tive it's calk'lated to hurt his feelin's, an' we passes the idee up. At the worst we can stampede over to sustain him, in case his nerves takes to ghost-dancin' an' he breaks down onder the strain.

"It's about first drink time in the evenin', an' we're all—that is all but Boggs, who is over with Sandy—loafin' sorrowfully about the Red Light, regalin' ourselves with seegyars, an' h'istin' in the yoosual drinks, by way of keepin' up our sperits. Rucker's with us; for Missis Rucker lets on at supper time that she an' Faro Nell is goin' to pass a hour or two with Tucson Jennie, an' Rucker—the old horned toad!—takes advantage, an' escapes across to us. This yere double deesertion don't leave nobody in the O. K. House except Boggs an' Sandy; that is nobody save a passel of Mexican meenyals, who's rustlin' about washin' supper plates in the kitchen.

"Time goes on, an' it looks like Boggs is goin' to get along all safe. He's some wrought up though, an' at intervals none too far apart comes caperin' over for his forty drops of Old Jordan.

"'Bein' deepressed about Sandy, that a-way,' he reemarks, 'I'm libatin' freer than common. But gents, it's all in the day's work!' Yere he sighs prodigious.

"None of us lets fly any comments, an' when he's got his licker he goes pirootin' back to Sandy.

"Thar's nothin' gala goin' among us, as we sets 'round, an' it brings relief when a mealy tenderfoot wanders up an' heads for Rucker.

"'Be you the gent,' says the mealy tenderfoot to Rucker, speakin' a heap diffident—'be you the gent who keeps the feed shop over the way?'

"'Which my wife—' says Rucker; an' then he ketches himse'f.

"Rucker ain't got no more spunk than jack-rabbits; but he notices how the mealy tenderfoot looks timid an' 'pologetic, an' allows he'll rough him some by way of givin' his manhood a picnic, him not darin', while Missis Rucker is rummagin' about, to say his soul's his own.

"'Be I what?' deemands Rucker, shiftin' his manner from feeble to fierce.

"'Be you the gent who deals the feed-game across the street?' says the mealy tenderfoot, still more diffident.

"'Well, whatever if I be?' growls Rucker.

"Which, he shorely is the surliest boniface! It's him bein' roped up from among them Apaches, where he's livin' at peace that time, which sours him. An' yet that ain't no excoose; an' it's even money, if we-all ain't bowed down about Sandy, Cherokee or Jack Moore or some other philanthropist would have whacked him over the head with a gun.

"'Nothin' if you be,' repeats the mealy tenderfoot; 'only I wants somethin' to eat.'

"'Oh, you wants somethin' to eat,' retorts Rucker, puttin' on dog egreegious. 'Who be you?'

"'Me?' says the mealy tenderfoot. 'I'm travellin'

salesman for the One-Spoon Bakin' Powder Company of St. Looey. I've been workin' the Red Dog stores all day; an' now I'm some peckish, an' desires food.'

"'Well,' snarls Rucker, 'you-all don't reckon I'm goin' to prodooce a table an' feed you right yere in the Red Light, do you? Your best hold is to go romancin' over to the O. K. House, camp down in the dinin' room, an' raise th' long yell. Most likely, if you yells loud enough an' long enough, somebody'll come ransackin' along an' stake you to some grub, merely to get shet of your noise.'

"With this, Rucker settles back as lofty as though he an' not Missis Rucker is boss.

"'Rucker,' breaks out Jack Moore, when the mealy one-spoon person has started off, 'you certainly are the most reepellant landlord I ever gets ag'inst! It's half-in half-out of my mind while you're runnin' your on-called for blazer, to pass that one-spoon party my gun, an' urge him to t'ar into you.'

"'But you-all don't onderstand, Jack,' expostchoolates Rucker, beginnin' to lay down. 'Which you never runs no restauraw. Some of these yere fly-by-night boarders seems to think I've got to pack 'em in cotton battin' an' sing 'em to sleep.'

"The matter drops, an' for a while we sets 'round placid an' wordless. Then, mebby because his thoughts is runnin' on Sandy, Texas Thompson reelates how he once sees a goblin cow.

"'It's back on the Canadian,' says Texas. 'I'm settin' by my camp fire, when thar of a sudden stands a

cow. I can't see the brand, because her face is my way, but the y'ear-marks is a swallow-fork in each y'ear. Thar bein' no sech y'ear-marks on that range, I gets the notion it's a spook-cow, an' whanges away with my six-shooter accordin'. When the smoke cl'ars aside, thar I be alone as former; no cow, no nothin'. From which I'm driven to conclood it's a spook-cow.'

"At this junctchoor, Boggs comes trapsin' across for more licker, an' by way of washin' the taste of Texas's goblin cow out of our mouths we j'ins him. Boggs, bein' refreshed, goes teeterin' back ag'in to Sandy, an' we-all settles down once more.

"Cherokee gets garroolous next, an' is beginnin' to wonder wherever Hamilton'll round up another fiddler, when the timid one-spoon person returns, an' fronts up to Rucker the second time.

"'Now that my hunger's appeased,' says the one-spoon person, 'I wants to go to bed. I've been skallyhootin' hither an' yon all day with them Red Dog tarrapins, an' I'm about dead on my laigs.'

"'An',' breaks in Rucker, beginnin' to bristle—which knowin' he's safe, the temptation to buffalo that one-spoon stranger is too strong—'of course it's up to me to sashay over an' tuck you in a whole lot. Listen! If you're honin' for sleep, you clinch onto one of them candles standin' on the side table; an' if a blanket-bed with a goose-ha'r pillow is anywhere near your speed, you'll find them luxuries waitin' at the head of the stairs.'

"'Well,' retorts the one-spoon person, who's food

had braced him up a lot, 'all I got to say is you're a mighty ornery host.'

"'Never mind,' says Rucker, 'about me bein' ornery. Your only show for a bed is to obey my mandates.'

"As the one-spoon person departs, Boggs comes rackin' along back for further licker.

"'I don't want to vie with you none, Monte,' says Boggs, addressin' Old Monte, who's jest up from the stage office, an' who, as I long ago tells you is Wolfville's offishul sot, 'but I shorely don't recall when I'm quite this parched. It's woe does it.'

"Boggs dallies 'round about his drink, bein' lonesome I reckon, an' consoomes all the time he can. As he stands by the bar, sniffin' his rum delicate, he turns to Enright.

"'You-all used to know Sandy's pap, Sam?' he observes. 'What for an old maverick was he?'

"'The old man's dead now,' replies Enright, who onderstands how Boggs is shakin' the bresh for preetexts, an' is willin' to he'p him out. 'Speakin' of the tomb, he beat Sandy to it by three years. I recalls the first time I sees this yere old Carr; it's one of them summers I goes visitin' my fam'ly in Tennessee. The day is plenty fervent, bein' August; the sun blazin' down direct, fairly b'ilin' the black mud of the Cumberland bottoms. I've cinched a saddle onto a hoss, an' am workin' off towards the Upper Hawgthief to see some cousins. As I goes perusin' on my windin' way, I crosses up with a measly little one-room shack, in the black midst of them bubblin' sweatin' bottoms. Thar's a shrivelled rag of a party camped out in front. He's settin' on a elm stump, that's

plumb oncovered to the blisterin' sun; an' what's more, he's got a blanket overcoat wropped about him, collar turned up, same as if he's in Nova Zembla.

"'As I pulls to a halt, he brings his peaked weasel face around, an' glances out from onder his old wool hat.

"'"Why don't you reemove a heap into the shade of yonder tree?" I asks, breakin' ground for better acquaintance.

"'"'Cause the chill's on," says Weasel-face. "Bimeby, when the fever's on, I'll shore hunt some shade."

"'"How long have you reesided yere?" I asks.

"'"Thirty year," says Weasel-face.

"'"How long have you had the agger?"

"'"Thirty year."

"'"Whyever don't you pull your freight?"

"'"Which you-all can't none, an' no money."

"'"What's the matter of earnin' money?" I says. "It looks like in thirty years you might have caught on to some sort o' bank-roll."

"'"You think so, stranger!" retorts Weasel-face, sneerin' up at me from onder the wool hat. "Now look yere: Since I've had the agger—an' that's thirty year—I ain't been fit for nothin' but to shake down persimmons an' sift meal, an' you can't accumyoolate no riches at sech arts."

"'That Weasel-faced, agger-eaten party, gents,' concloods Enright, signin' up to Black Jack for the glasses, 'is none other than old Carr, Sandy's pap; an', as I mentions prior, I always allows Sandy bein' ricketty an'

weakly that a-way, is doo primar'ly to the fever-soaked stock he comes from.'

"Boggs takes advantage of Enright's signals to Black Jack, an' hangs on desp'rate. Then Old Monte, sort o' onbucklin' with his rum, begins to remember things, an' that gives Boggs a fresh excoose. The old drunkard's told the aneckdote more'n forty times, but Boggs clings to every word, same as if it's a roast apple, an' heaves in questions, an' tantalizes 'round pretendin' he's breathless with interest, an' the tale plumb new entire. The yarn's about how Old Monte gets stuck up once in the North Georgia Mountains, by moonshiners, an' is drug off his buckboard, an' herded along down a mountain side to shave a dead man.

"'They-all not havin' no razor,' explains Old Monte; 'an', in foolish forgetfulness born of grief, promisin' deefunct to shave him before they mows him away in the grave. Talk of patriarchs; that old chief of the moonshiners has a beard big enough to stuff a pillow! Which them mourners that corrals me, an' my razor, is that grateful when I'm through, they endows me with a gallon of moonshine whiskey pale as water. I'd have give 'em the razor; only I'm afraid they'll feel crit'cized. So, after I'm out o' sight, I flings it away in a canyon. Gents, them Georgia mountaineers is barbarians!' an' with this yere dictum, Old Monte buries his nose in his licker afresh."

CHAPTER XVI

BOGGS AND THE GHOST

NOTHIN' new in the way of topics bein' started, Boggs goes slowly an' reluctantly over to Sandy ag'in. When he's gone, we-all subsides into quietood.

"The silence final grows irksome, an' Cherokee gets to expandin' concernin' sperit-rappin's, table-tippin', and sim'lar cantrips, all onexplan'ble.

"'At that,' says Cherokee, an' his manner is sech as to throw doubt on his words, 'I don't attriboote them pheenomenons to occult inflooences none. But what I do know is that when old Two-p'ar Blakely—he's called Two-p'ar that a-way from a habit he has of raisin' before the draw when possessed of two-p'ars—loses his last chip ag'inst Crawford's bank in Vegas, an' falls dead across the lay-out, somethin' not in the game gives the table sech a thump the deal-box jumps a foot, an' every stack in the check-rack goes crashin' to the floor.'

"These yere reminescences leaves us so spraddled out in sperit, that when Black Jack behind the bar drops a glass, every gent springs to his feet, an' Rucker falls plumb off the candle box he's usin' as a seat.

"'Whatever's the good, Cherokee,' exclaims Texas Thompson, who's been harrowed excessive by them

partic'lars touchin' Two-p'ar Blakely—"whatever's the good of bringin' up sech fool mem'ries? It's enough to curdle folks!'

"'Which if it's any more curdlin',' returns Cherokee, plenty testy, 'than that mirac'lous cow you encounters on the Canadian, I asks you to p'int out in what respecks.'

"Before Texas can reply, a turrible eevent takes place. We're grouped about on the platform in front of the Red Light at the time, an' it's sech a comb'nation of the frightful an' the abrupt it simply congeals us where we be. Talk of pans of milk from top shelves! Sech catastrophies is slow an' gyarded in their approach, an' can be seen comin' for months, compar'd to what ensoos.

"At that, if we has Doc Peets among us, I always figgers we'd have come through onscathed. Peets, as I mentions once or twice perhaps, is the best eddicated gent between the Colorado an' the Rio Grande; an', when mysteries commence to thicken an' you-all go gropin' 'round for eloocidations, thar's nothin' like havin' a eddicated scientist at your elbow to appeal to with your troubles. But Peets is miles distant at the Box-D, an' we're left in our he'pless darkened way to face our doom alone.

"Jest as Cherokee grows peevish with Texas, like I relates, we hears a horrifyin' crash from t'other side of the street, an' next thar's Boggs hurlin' himse'f, without the slightest reference to how he's goin' to 'light, from the window of Sandy's lean-to. It checks our breath, an' throws our hearts back on their haunches! The shock is multiplied when, with not a moment to s'par' between

'em, a white, ghastly flutterin' ghost-thing throws itse'f from the same window, an' swoops shriekin' down on top of Boggs. Not that it captures Boggs; before it more'n gets to touch him, he's up an' off like a scared wolf. Also, the howls he eemits as he flies, would have drove wolves to sooicide.

"When Boggs takes to flight, the white ghostly thing is not to be shook from its purpose. With a screech, the frightful equal of Boggs's best, it lines out on his trail, not the length of a lariat behind.

"Thar's nothin' we-all can do but stand thar frozen, our veins ice, hopin' all we know for Boggs. Troo, Jack Moore, who as kettle tender for the stranglers feels like affairs is up to him offishul, does pull his gun. But whatever good is guns at sech eepocks?

"The night is bright moonlight, an' moonlight in Arizona is better than sunlight in a fog-obscured East. Bein' almost as bright as noon, the dimmest eye among us has no trouble in keepin' tabs on the awful chase. Boggs splits the air like an alarmed comet, the white flutterin' specter-thing at his heels, an' both sendin' forth yell for yell to make you creep. The whole hidjeous spectacle don't consoome a minute. Boggs, evolvin' a screech for every jump, heads out onto the plains, the ghost-thing—splittin' even on jumps an' screeches—hangin' to his r'ar like he owes him money.

"When they've run mebby half a mile, Boggs veers to the left, an', comin' 'round on a broad curve, re-makes frenzied tracks for camp. Before we-all can even think, let alone arrange for their reception, pursooer an' pur-

sooed, the ghost-thing an' Boggs, is t'arin' down upon us like the breath of destiny. Which we never moves! We're rooted to the spot, our quakin' moccasins glued in terror to the floor! On they comes; Boggs holdin' his own!

"Now dawns the end. Jest as Boggs is flashin' by the Red Light, a howl of despair in his throat, he stumbles an' falls. Tharupon the flutterin' ghost-thing trips over him, an' rolls twenty feet beyond.

"The ghost-thing spreads itse'f out flat when it stops, right where the light from the Red Light windows falls all across it. With that the scales falls from our eyes.

"'I'm a Mexican,' exclaims Tutt, 'if it ain't that reedic'lous one-spoon bakin'-powder sport!'

"Not a word is uttered as every one collects a deep breath. Tutt calls the turn; the specter, who's been swingin' an' rattlin' so deemoniac with pore Boggs, is none other than that same one-spoon boarder, who's, earlier in the evenin', been pesterin' 'round Rucker. Rucker himse'f is the last to learn the news, seein' he's down on his knees, repeatin' 'Now I lay me' to beat four of a kind, when Tutt solves the specter's identity.

"Boggs, gaspin' an' speechless, eyes rollin', fingers clutchin', is he'ped to a cha'r, an' licker administered. That done, we grapples onto the one-spoon person, an' sets him on his two feet.

"It's then that Tucson Jennie, Faro Nell an' Missis Rucker comes chargin' up on the lope; an', since the one-spoon person is but lightly arrayed, bein' caparisoned for slumber that a-way, we wrops him in a hoss-blanket

so as to save 'em all we can. Shore, thar's no standin' 'em off, not even with a Winchester, they're that inquis'-tive! You know what ladies be; speshully in moments of thrillin' excitement, crowded full with ontoward eevents?

"Enright, who all through comes the nearest to re-tainin' his aplomb, begins to put questions.

"'Which I asks your forbearance,' says the one-spoon person, replyin' to Enright—he's got Boggs skinned in the matter of comin' 'round. 'As soon as ever I re-organizes my frazzled faculties, I'll shore explain the best I can. When, at the behests of yonder viper'—yere he p'ints at Rucker, shakin' an' shiverin' about the suburbs of the group—'who's onfit to run a boardin' house for rattle-snakes, an' whom I intends to fully immolate so soon as my strength returns, when, I say, at the behests of that viper, I leaves you-all an' goes lookin' for a couch, I follows his croode directions to the letter. I takes a candle, climbs the stair, an' thar at the stair-head, like he says, I sees a open door. Which it's the door to the room from the window whereof you so lately beholds me come soarin'; an' to which I shall refoose to return, though as a consequence I sleeps in the street. The door bein' open, I enters. Thar's a candle burnin' on the table by the window, where also reposes a fiddle-box.'

"'Which Dan,' breaks in Texas Thompson, 'insists on takin' the fiddle with him, allowin' it'll please Sandy a heap, should he be hoverin' near.'

"'Down at the far end of the apartment,' goes on the one-spoon person, 'I makes out a gent in bed. I takes

him for the individyooal who belongs with the fiddle-box. Of course, I wasn't brought up two-in-a-bed at home; but I ain't met with no sech gracious reception, since I've been squanderin' about in Arizona, as to encourage me in makin' any kicks. So I keeps mighty quiet, makin' up my mind to tolerate the fiddle party. I lays aside my raiment, an' takes up a place on the extreme outside edge of the couch, so's not to disturb the troobadour. I blows out my own candle, leavin' t'other gutterin' away like I finds it. That's another lesson I learns early in these yere regions, which is never to disturb local conditions. Wharfore, I lets the orig'nal light burn on.'

"'Which you ain't no such dullard as you looks!' interjecks Tutt, aimin' to reasshore the one-spoon person, who continyoos to be some tremyoolous.

"'Bein' weary of the world,' goes on the latter, 'I falls asleep plenty prompt. When I rouses, which is most likely within a few minutes, I'm some smitten of wonder at a party settin' by the table, fondlin' the fiddle-box. "Whatever is he after?" I asks myse'f. "Shorely he can't think of stakin' out a claim on a room as to which two of us has already took out papers!" Roominatin' thus, I r'ars up on my elbow to begin a conversation. The same, when begun, is broke off at the first word, by the gent I'm addressin' divin' head-first through the window, carryin' sash an' all.'

"'Onder the circumstances, I should say as much!' ejaculates Jack Moore, who's drinkin' in every word.

"'Gents, the rest though fear-inspirin' an' painful

shouldn't take long. As the party by the table makes that onlooked for header through the window, I starts to wake up the troobadour to collect his views on what's took place. I needn't dilate; suffice it that I go through the window a moment later, plumb greedy for the trip. The rest you know; an' now, if some Samaritan'll organize a rescoo expedition to go an' fetch my clothes, I'll be deeply thankful.'

"'What you've said,' remarks Enright, 'is a heap clar'-fyin'; but you don't furnish s'fficient reason for huntin' an' harrassin' our inoffensive townsman up an' down the face of nacher, an' scarin' him to death.'

"'Believe me,' says the one-spoon person, 'I keenly realizes it's thar my deefence is weak. Thar's no reason which I can assign for pursooin' your friend, except that when I hits the ground my feelin's is in a toomult, an' the sight of him, runnin' an' racin' an' yellin', fac'n-ates me into givin' forth kindred yells of sympathy an' followin' his lead. I suppose I nacherally ups an' chases him a whole lot for luck. Also, permit me to remark that the route he seelects incloodes vegetation of both a cactus an' a mesquite order, an' it looks now in consequence—me bein' b'arfoot that a-way—like my expense account ag'inst the One-Spoon Bakin' Powder Company'll have to carry a hoss an' wagon from now till further notice.'

"Thar's nothin' more to relate," concluded the old gentleman. "The most gallin' feachure is when a band of Red Dog scorners comes troopin' up, spurs jinglin', leathers creakin', sayin' from our screams they takes it

we're bein' skelped by Injuns, an' has come to give us their protection. Boggs? It takes weeks, an' no end of drugs, an' two of us standin' watch an' watch by his blankets; but in the end we brings him back to health. He's plumb patient, an' declar's that no one's to blame but himse'f.

"'Gents,' he says, 'sooperstition is my weakness—the one weakness in a constitootion otherwise without a flaw.' Then, alloodin' to a long-ago sport that Peets was tellin' of one evenin': 'Ghosts is my Achilles' heel, gents. That's whatever, they're my Achilles' heel!'"

CHAPTER XVII

COTTONWOOD WASSON

"NEVER but once is Old Man Enright floored," observed my gray raconteur reminiscently; "that is floored through one of them masterly manoovers, by which a gent goes round another gent's flank an' crawls his hump strategic. An' yet I don't aim to be onderstood none as sayin' that Enright never is up ag'inst it. Which of course he ain't no more upholstered to make aces-up beat three-of-a-kind than you or me, an' when brought to bay by sech barriers of nacher he, like other folks, is shore obleeged to lay down. What I'm tryin' to say is that, where it's a case of savey an' seein' your way through, Enright never gets downed but once.

"It's Cottonwood Wasson who performs this mir'cle. An' what contreebutes, speshul, to the strangeness of the play is that this Cottonwood person is nothin' more'n a yooth—a callow yooth—camped on the sunrise side of twenty. Enright, as ag'inst this yere callowness of Cottonwood's, shows three times the years. I never counts the rings on his horns, personal, holdin' it bad manners to go projectin' about locatin' another gent's age, but it's safe to say he's sixty. Now thar's a heap of experience comin' to a gent in sixty years—a heap of

cattle to travel the trail—an' for him, with all he's seen an' met an' coped with, to be took out of the saddle by a child, is strange to the p'int of crowdin' the yoonique. Enright says himse'f that, on the hocks of it, his conceit goes to bed sick for a week. The deevice, too, which overcomes him is as simple as seven-up—an' something like it—after Cherokee explains. It lets Cottonwood out though; an' fools Enright to a frazzle—fools him likewise in his offishul c'pacity as chief of the stranglers, which is drawin' the cinch plenty tight."

The old gentleman made a profound pause, and forgot everything else—apparently—while he filled his pipe. I was too well taught to put a question, or break out in comment. He would back away from either like a pony at sight of a bridle. Therefore, I puffed at my cigar in silence. My wary forbearance went not without results. Pipe lighted, grizzled head in a cloud of smoke through which his fine if wrinkled features gleamed out upon me as through a fog, he again took up the thread of narrative.

"This Cottonwood Wasson," he continued in a musing way, "don't live in Wolfville. For that matter I ain't none shore he reesides anywhere. My idee is that he passes his shallow days cavortin' round permiscus, now in Wolfville, now in Red Dog or Tucson or Colton or Lordsburg, or mebby even Silver City. Which he is certainly the restlessest party whoever onbosoms himse'f in whoops, an' it looks like his natif element is toomult. Not that he's hostile, or prone to lock horns with peaceful folks an' paw for trouble, but his common gait

is to go chargin' up an' down the street, between drinks, spurrin' his mustange to a frenzy of buckin', meanwhile slammin' away with his six-shooter at tin tomatter cans, an' empty beer bottles, an' sim'lar obsolete truck.

"But Cottonwood never shoots at no people. That is, never onless you insists on countin' a Chinaman, which Wolfville is too conserv'tive to do. What!—Chinamen is folks? Not in the eddicated estimation of Arizona, son! His merely bein' willin' to work can't be permitted to pedestal him as part of an American pop'lation. If that's argyment, we'll be lettin' mules an' Mexicans vote before we quit.

"No; Cottonwood don't bump off this opium slave complete. He's only tryin' a snap-shot at his cue at the time, an' perhaps his hand shakes, or the chink makes a fool move or something, an' the bullet sort o' burns his neck. Which you might have been jestified in thinkin' he's beefed, however, from the yells he turns loose. They even hears 'em in Red Dog, an' lets on later to some teamsters from Tucson that they allows it's one of us—sech is the envy wherewith them cheap Red Dog outcasts regyards Wolfville an' its citizens.

"Boggs at the time insists that measures should be took with Cottonwood. He even stirs up Enright, who tries to smooth him out.

"'It's only the exyooberance of boyhood,' says Enright. 'An' you was a boy once, yourse'f, Dan.' Which Enright is plumb forbearin' that-a-way with the young.

"'Jest the same,' argues Boggs, 'I holds it's up to you, as chief of the vig'lance committee, to mark out a res-

ervation for this headlong Cottonwood. Have lariats an' windmills no purpose? Is the stranglers a joke? Is that forum of jestice conceived in a sperit of mirth?'

"'No,' says Enright, some emphatic, 'it ain't. But what, I asks you as a member of the committee, do you desire to do? As yet we have no calaboose, though plans is bein' formyoolated an' that capstone to civilization is on its way. Pendin' said calaboose, however, what would you su'gest? I shorely trusts you ain't that inhooman as to advise a rope for a boy in his teens. An' for nothin' more heenous than crackin' off his 45!'

"'But he disturbs my peace,' urges Boggs petyoolantly. 'I tells you he gives me indigestion. I'm gettin' along into middle years, an' my stomach ain't what it was; but if ever Doc Peets tells me that the way I feels is doo, primar'ly, to them lone-hand fest'vals which this yere Cottonwood engages in, I'll wear out my six-shooter on his empty head. Which I'll shore buffalo that young merry-maker into a more mod'rate frame, or my name ain't Boggs. I don't hunger to win fame as the Wolfville Herod, an' slaughter children; I'm no one to imbroo my hands in the blood of babes an' sucklin's; but thar's exceptions to every roole, hoomane or otherwise.'

"Boggs goes pacin' up an' down the Red Light as he makes these fulminations, while Enright sits benign an' comfortably placid. We're all that used to Boggs' peevishness, him bein' by nacher nervous to the verge of emotional, no one pays much heed. But at that, Cottonwood don't escape without rebooke; for jest as Boggs

ceases, who should come plungin' along, but Armstrong from the New York Store. Like Boggs, he says that hobbles must be put on Cottonwood, or subsequent deevelopments may come off in the smoke.

"'Which I must say,' remarks Enright after listenin' to Armstrong a heap disgusted, 'that thar's a powerful sight of tomtom playin' an' skelp dancin' about nothin'. Yere's a boy, possessed of them effervescent sperits yoosual with his time of life, runs his pony up the street, bangs away with his gun, an' casyooally creases a chink. Wharupon two fullgrown gents goes teeteerin' 'round, talkin' of vig'lance committees, with ropes an' windmills for a finish. This yere attitoode of narrowness, Armstrong, don't do you an' Dan no credit. You-all acts as though a Chinaman is jooelry.'

"'Chinaman!' exclaims Armstrong, full of contempt. 'Do you reckon, I'd leave my business to bluff 'round about a saddle-colored serf of the orient? Which the warmth of your manner is explained. No; yere's the prop'sition: This sportive yooth is interferin' with trade. That Mongol is on his way to my store to spend money when Cottonwood opens on him. What I says is that sech action is inconsid'rate an' he should be taught to think before he shoots.'

"Enright signs up the bar-keep to set out the licker.

"'I was shore obtoose,' he says, softly, his manner apol'getic, 'an' I must say I can't see how I'm so dull as to go followin' off the wrong wagon-track that a-way. You're plumb right, Armstrong. This Chinaman is out to buy soap or starch or blooin' or what other chem'c-

als he employs in his suds-sloppin', when Cottonwood heads him off with that gun-play. Shore, I'll give him warnin'. A Chinaman is one thing; but commerce must not an' shall not be shot up.'

"Jack Moore, at Enright's behest, brings in the eboolient Cottonwood, who seems a heap cast down. He's that modest it half way disarms Boggs, who whispers to Enright that he reckons if he counsels Cottonwood to practyce more reserve with that six-shooter of his, it will likely answer all demands.

"'Which I adopts your view, Sam,' observes Boggs, surveyin' Cottonwood, who shore does look mighty young an' small; 'it's plain he ain't lynchin' size as yet.'

"For all Boggs' intercessions, Enright assoomes a sour, forbiddin' manner. 'Cottonwood,' he says, 'I wouldn't if I was you bank too strong on my want of years, to go pressin' the limit of the public patience. We've put up with a sight from you; an' it's the opinion of gents, expert in sech matters, that, if you go romancin' along as headed, you'll onexpectedly enter upon life everlastin'. It's bad enough to go settin' Dan an' other sens'tive folks on edge with your hubbubs, but to-day you takes a further downward step, an' puts at deefiance the rooles of trade. Do you-all realize how that Chinaman, when you singed him, is on his way to buy things at the New York Store?'

"Cottonwood protests that the idee never enters his head.

"'It's then as I thought,' goes on Enright, sort o' relaxin'. 'What you does is not doo to malice; but jest the

same it's indiscrete. Now I won't tell you twice, Cottonwood. Wolfville will not tol'rate interference with business interests. Yereafter, when moved to go burnin' up the scenery about a Chinaman with your gun, be shore it's after he makes his purchases. Now *vamos*, an' avoid footure criticism.'

"Cottonwood is more or less conscience stricken over Enright's words, an' promises to mend his ways. An' to show his feelin's has been reely touched, an' he's tryin' to improve, he takes the saddle off his pony an' goes on foot for mebby it's three days. He's so plumb quiet, too, that general confidence is restored in him to sech a degree that Cherokee Hall, who's yeretofore barred him at farobank as too young an' voylent, considers reemovin' those disabilities an' permittin' him to buck the game onchecked. It's among things shore that, if Cottonwood had persisted in his quietoods, he'd stood publicly out of sight inside another week.

"Boggs even says to Texas Thompson, 'It's amazin' how that Cottonwood boy has improved since Sam advises with him. It certainly does knock his horns off, an' no mistake.'

"'Which I figger,' returns Texas, who's more judgmatical than Boggs, 'that the changes you rejoices over is the froote rather of fear than of any resolootion to lead a happier an' a better life. Old Sam Enright's got a mighty piercin' eye, an' thar's a gray gleam in it like the shine of a new bowie. It's calk'lated to send a thrill of apprehension through a wrong-doer, like the grace of heaven through a campmeetin', an' nacherally it daunts

Cottonwood a whole lot. I'm yere to say I never does meet up with any party possessin' sech commandin' eyes, except my former Laredo wife. As for that lady, a glance of reproof from her was like bein' struck by lightnin'.

"'All the same,' returns Boggs, 'I feels more lib'ral than you about Cottonwood. It's my belief his reform is sincere.'

"'Well,' breaks in Tutt who's listenin', 'while I'll be proud to lose, I don't mind bettin' you a stack of reds, Dan, that this Cottonwood coyote cuts loose ag'in inside of no time.'

"'Cuts loose?' repeats Boggs. 'To what extremes?'

"'I'll gamble you-all he gets that egreegious the stranglers comes together,' says Tutt.

"'It's a go,' says Boggs; 'although I'm driven to reemark, Dave, that your tastes for specyoolation has most likely betrayed you into the hole. This Cottonwood boy'll be as tame as tabby cats.'

"It's the next day, while Cottonwood is loafin' about, solemn an' seedate, that Old Monte swings in with the stage. He fetches with him two tenderfeet.

"'An' they ain't got a thing but money!' says Old Monte, as he pitches the letter bags to the postmaster, an' tumbles into the street. 'I couldn't quite get onto their game, but the barkeep in Oriental jest before I pulls out of Tucson, asshores me they're yere to invest.'

"The strangers pitches camp at the O. K. Restauraw, an' after Enright gets out of Old Monte all he's able to

commoonicate—which is plenty scanty, for the amount that old sot can't find out onder the most fav'rable circumstances is plumb surprisin'—he an' Doc Peets goes squanderin' over. These yere demonstrations gets pop'lar anticipation all keyed up.

"'Thar you see the two wisest sharps this side of the Missouri!' exclaims Dave Tutt, lookin' after Enright an' Peets. 'If they can't convince them millionaires of Arizona's footure, then it don't lay in the deck.'

"'The same bein' my belief complete,' says Boggs, who's celebratin' the advent of the tenderfeet out of a bottle. 'You bet Enright an' Peets'll rope an' hawg-tie these yere capitalists, an' have 'em all spread out for brandin' too easy.'

"'While we're hankerin' round the Red Light, talkin' it over, Enright comes back. I never sees him more pleased.

"'Gents.' he says, takin' the bottle from Boggs, 'them strangers is shore auriferous. They ain't made up their minds what avenoos of trade they'll tread, but their fixed impression is they'll stay.'

"'How strong be they?' asks Tutt. 'How big a bankroll do you reckon now they've got?'

"'Which of course,' says Enright, 'I don't put the question none direct, havin' too much tact, but they talks of a hundred thousand dollars like Dan does of a round of drinks. I regyards their presence as eepock makin'. Peets is with 'em; an' if they has idees he'll expand 'em, an' if they has doubts he'll bed 'em down.'

"'Shore!' says Boggs, mighty confident; 'Peets'll have

them investors walkin' Spanish too quick. I looks on the play as cinched.'

"'Speakin' general,' returns Enright, 'I must say I shares Dan's confidence. Still, thar's a chance. Like most sports from the East, oninyoored to Arizona ways, they're timid. They asks me partic'ler whether law is respected, an' do we set a valyoo on human life. It wouldn't do to startle 'em on them p'ints.'

"'Valyoo hooman life!' exclaims Texas Thompson, some indignant. 'Whatever is them mavericks talkin' about? Ain't we got a vig'lance committee? Don't every gent pack a gun? With sech evidences like an open book before 'em, don't it look like we valyoos hooman life?'

"'An' as for respectin' the law,' adds Boggs; 'it's a pity Curly Bill, or some other party on whom the game law's out, couldn't wander into camp right now. A joodicious lynchin' would be the convincin' caper! It would shore show 'em whether we respects the law or not.'"

CHAPTER XVIII

TOP AND BOTTOM

ENRIGHT su'gests to Tutt that if Tucson Jennie p'rades the street leadin' little Enright Peets Tutt, it would give the camp a quiet domestic look.

"'The sight of sech a child as Enright Peets,' he says, 'couldn't fail to nootralize any roughness; that done I'd look on vict'ry as secure. Also some gent ought to prance over, an' pass the word to Missis Rucker not to tyrranize over pore Rucker too open in the presence of our visitors. But on second thought it would hurt her feelin's an' lead to onpleasant sequels; so mebby it's as well to pass it up.'

"It's yere Doc Peets comes weavin' in, smilin' wide an' complacent. 'It's all right, Sam,' says Peets, addressin' Enright; 'I left 'em gettin' ready for chuck. It don't do to talk to 'em too much at the jump; they might think the camp has designs.'

"'Right you be, Doc,' breaks in Texas. 'Capitalists that a-way is like antelopes; the way to hunt 'em is to sit still.'

"'An' Missis Rucker?' urges Enright, sort o' anxious.

"'Which May mornin's is harsh to her,' returns Peets. 'She's got Rucker out in the kitchen, slicin' salt-hoss an' openin' air-tights, an' is preparin' to deal them guests the gastronimic game of the year. Also her attitoode

towards Rucker is one of peace an' gentleness; they're gettin' along as congenial as so much milk an' honey.'

"Enright heaves a sigh, lights a seegyar, an' leans back like one who sees triumph on its windin' way. He beams round on the boys, an' says:

"'Bein' no one to count my chickens prematoor, I've reefrained from any prophetic bluffs. But after hearin' from the Doc, I'm yere to say we've got the sityooation treed an' out on a limb. These cap'talists is ours.'

"It's now, when hope is highest, thar comes a yell that sounds like an Injun outbreak, an' a pony goes flashin' up the street as though he's shot out of a gun. Every gent looks up, Enright some disturbed.

"'Now what onmuzzled Siwash is that?' he asks, an' his tones is plenty ferocious. 'Who is it goes promotin' uproar at a crisis like this?'

"'It's that exasperatin' Cottonwood,' replies Boggs. 'He's loose ag'in, an' organizin' to stand the town on its head.'

"'Jack,' says Enright, wheelin' short an' fierce on Jack Moore, 'go bend a gun over his locoed pate. He'll throw down all our plans!'

"Before Jack can get to Cottonwood, the worst possible occurs. The two cap'talists, on hearin' the whoops, nacherally comes to the O. K. door to see what's up. One of 'em, who's got on a plug hat, is speshul interested. As Cottonwood sails by, w'irlin' his six-shooter on his finger, the plug hat stranger seems to go into a trance of admiration, perceivin' which Cottonwood yanks his pony up short, an' surveys him plenty disdainful.

"'Whoever licensed you to wear sech a warbonnet as that?' demands Cottonwood, dictatin' at the plug hat with his gun. 'Don't you-all know it's ag'in the rooles of our set?'

"'Whatever be you talkin' about!' exclaims the plug hat party, plumb took aback.

"'Do you-all reckon,' goes on Cottonwood, disregyardin' the question, 'that we're sech prairie dogs as to let a schemin' shorthorn go onderminin' us with his deboshed plug hat? If so, why was Bunker Hill an' wharfore Yorktown? Unless I nips this plug hat movement in the bud, you'll be playin' a w'ite shirt on us next.'

"Before the astonished tenderfoot can say a word, Cottonwood whips off the plug hat an' claps it on the muzzle of his gun. This done, he begins shakin' the loads out of his weepon same as if it's a bunch of crackers. He shorely does make a colander of that headgear! Jest as he's fetched loose the last shot, Jack Moore snatches him from the saddle like he's a sack of flour.

"'Whatever's the row now?' demands Cottonwood. 'Do the ordinances of this yere puerile outfit extend to the protection of plug hats? If they do, I quit you right now.'

"'You'd better keep your feelin's hobbled,' says Jack, 'ontil you see Old Man Enright. An', as for quittin' Wolfville, the chances are that, when he gets done with you, you'll deecide to stay yere till the final trump.'

"Which I never did see two tenderfeet so yoonanimous for goin' back before! In no time after Cottonwood

ventilates that plug hat, they're orderin' speshul buckboards from the corral, an' gettin' packed to pull their freight. They allows they've been imposed on by the barkeep at the Oriental over in Tucson, he havin' described Wolfville as bein' as quiet as a church.

"'He sends us like lambs to the slaughter!' they says; 'an', once we're back, we'll onfurl to him our views concernin' the lies he tells.'

"Shore! Enright talks, an' Peets talks; but what's the use? They tries to make these yere visitors see things in their troo light, an' that it's only Cottonwood's way of bein' sociable. They even offers to hang Cottonwood, if the ceremony will promote a better onderstandin'. It's of no avail; after that gun play any gent who says 'Wolfville' to them cap'talists is barkin' at a knot. They simply won't have it! An' so, when the buckboard is ready, they goes tearin' off to the north, a handkerchief over the plug-hat party's skelp, the plug hat in his lap. He allows he'll take it East, to show what Arizona really is.

"'I reckon, Tutt,' says Boggs a heap moody, 'I owes you a red stack. I'll consider the money well invested if it results in my seein' that miserable Cottonwood's moccasins ten feet in the air.'

"Enright calls the committee together in the New York Store, though he states that the session is informal.

"'It's only intended to consider,' says he, 'in what manner we can best get this Cottonwood killed, with least disgrace to ourselves.'

"'Whatever have I done?' demands Cottonwood,

some querulous, as Jack Moore brings him before Enright an' the rest of us by the scruff of his neck. 'Whatever have I done now?'

"'What have you-all done?' repeats Enright, between rage an' disgust. 'You aims a blow at our prospects. Which you shows yourse'f a menace. An' you with half your milk-teeth yet! It's astonishin'! Cottonwood, if you was at years of discretion, thar wouldn't have been no pesterin' round with committee meetin's. I'd have had Dan, or Texas, or Jack yere, s'anter to the door with a Winchester, an' solve the trouble by shootin' you all up. Now answer me: What made you go swoopin' at that cap'talist?'

"'Cap'talist!' says Cottonwood. 'However do I savey he's a cap'talist? "Yere's a short horn," thinks I, "an' the camp plumb dead! I'll about jump in, liven things up a whole lot, an' give him a good impression." That's why I throws myse'f loose like I do.'

"'An' do you allow,' returns Enright, savage an' sarkastic, 'that to burn up the causeway with your pony, make a pinwheel of your six-shooter, an' finish off by shootin' a gent's only hat full of holes, is doo to make a good impression? Is that your idee of invitin' the confidence of a stranger?'

"After waitin' a while, an' Cottonwood makin' no reply, Enright goes on.

"'I can't get over the notion that you're more eediotic than crim'nal. An' yet that don't let us in or out, but leaves us sort o' straddle of a log. Which I confesses, not without shame, that I'm nonplussed. Yere you go

stampedin' them cap'talists—said conduct bein' a bet which no se'f-respectin' commoonity can overlook! An' yet thar's no jail to put you in! Besides, in that school of joorisproodence wharin I was reared, it's allers been held that when you've got a party you ought to lock up, you've got one you ought to kill. Cottonwood, I can't see nothin' for it but hang. Troo, you ain't bumped off no one; but, as reads the Constitootion, we're jestified in sending you over the divide onder the gen'ral welfare clause of that instrooment. That's my view; what do you say, Doc?'

"'Which I'm lost in the same neck of woods with yourse'f,' says Peets. 'I asks myse'f what else is thar to do?'

"Enright beats on the table, an' looks about. 'Has any gent a su'gestion?' he asks. Thar bein' no response, he turns again to Cottonwood, who stands round-eyed an' amazed like a young ground owl. 'Have you anything to offer before an outraged public uses you wharwith to dec'rate the wind-mill? As I states, we regrets this finish, but you forced our hands yourse'f. As for me, personal, I've stood between you an' pop'lar clamor all I will. If you've anything to say, speak out; an' while he's talkin', Jack, you might as well go for a lariat.'

"The locoed Cottonwood begins to take an interest. 'See yere,' he says, an' his manner is a heap plausible an' wheedlin'. 'You-all gents don't want to hang me. An', between us, thar's reasons private to me personal why I don't want to be hanged none. At least you-all ought to give a gent a show-down. I'll tell you what:

I'll nacherally cut the kyards to see whether I hang or go free? Or, if you objects to kyards, I'll throw the dice—first flash out of the box?'

"Enright, doorin' these proffers, is regyardin' Cottonwood doobious an' oncertain, like he can't make up his mind.

"'Or say,' goes on Cottonwood; 'I'll take a chance on this? You throw three dice; an' I'll agree to tell you, before you roll 'em, what number you'll throw, addin' spots on top to spots on the bottom. If I fail I hang.'

"Enright at this looks at Cottonwood commiseratin'ly; then he speaks low to Peets. 'This boy is out of his head, Doc,' he says. 'The fright has onsettled his intellects.'

"I'm not so shore,' says Peets. 'Which I'm afraid, I don't share your belief in him bein' upset mental. I figger he's got an ace buried. Still, since I'm mighty averse to stringin' up a yearlin', partic'lar when no life has been took, I shorely trusts he has. My su'gestion is to call his bluff.'

"'Do I onderstand,' says Enright, ag'in addressin' the guileful Cottonwood, 'that I'm to throw three dice; an' that you agrees to say before the throw, jest what the spots on top plus the spots next the table will count up?'

"'Preezackly,' returns Cottonwood, beginnin' to cheer up. 'If I fall down, it's a case of bring on the rope an' lead the march to the windmill. Failin' of a shore thing like this, I shore ought to have no further care to live.'

"'Pore boy!' sighs Enright. Then, turnin' to Boggs: 'Dan, go over to the Red Light, an' fetch the dice.'

"Enright shakes the three dice, while Jack Moore, who's got back from the corral, takes his stand at Cottonwood's elbow, the lariat over his arm. Enright raises his hand, makin' ready to throw. At that, Cottonwood shets his foxy eyes, pretendin' to think.

"'Which, top plus bottom,' he says, 'you'll throw twenty-one.'

"Enright sends the dice rattlin' along the table, while we-all crowds about. The dice show 'six–two–four'—twelve in all. We turns 'em over one by one, an' the bottoms shows 'one–five–three', bein' nine.

"'Thar you be!' cries Cottonwood, some exultant; 'twelve on top an' nine on the bottom, the same bein' twenty-one. I win.'

"'You win,' says Enright, an' he says it like a load is off his mind. Then he raises his hand, mighty impressive. 'One word Cottonwood, an' Wolfville is through with you, onless by some renooed breaks you reopens the game. By first drink time to-morry, you line out for Tucson. An' don't you come projectin' round this outfit no more, onless we gives you speshul leave. Which I'd run you out this evenin', only I'm afraid you'd track up on them fleein' short-horns, an' reecommence your outrages.'

"Cottonwood moves for the door without a word, for he's no sech fool as to go tamperin' with his luck by givin' vent to ontimely or ill-considered oratory. He's got the sense to let well enough alone, an' don't aim to go talkin' himse'f into new or deeper holes. When he's gone, Enright looks at Peets a heap puzzled, an' asks:

"'However do you reckon he does it, Doc?'

"Peets waves his hand like the play baffles him entire, an' appeals to Cherokee Hall, who's been watchin' them final proceedin's with a half grin in the corners of his mouth, like he's amused.

"'What is it, Cherokee, that boy does to us?' asks Peets. 'He's had us ag'inst some deadfall or other, but what is it?'

"'Why,' returns Cherokee, pickin' up the dice, 'it's as obvious as old John Chisholm's Fence-Rail brand. That Cottonwood simply hands you the old snap of Top-an'-Bottom in a new guise. An' I must concede that you falls for it like a bevy of farmers.'

"'Explain,' says Enright, who's sheepish to be took in by a child. 'You says "Top-an'-Bottom;" but you don't eloocidate. Yere I am with three dice in my hand, an' Cottonwood says "twenty-one." I throws; an' it is twenty-one. Now however does he know?'

"'How does he know?' repeats Cherokee, in smilin' tol'ration of Enright's ignorance. 'He knows, because it can't come anything else. If you was to throw these yere dice a thousand times, it would every trip come twenty-one. See yere!' an' Cherokee takes one of the dice between thumb an' finger. 'When dice is made, they puts the six opposite the ace, the doose opposite the five, the four opposite the trey. No matter how they roll or what comes up, the top an' bottom of each counts seven. Savey? Which bein' troo, throwin' three dice that a-way, the tops an' bottoms make three sevens—twenty-one.'

"In Enright's face chagrin an' knowledge is makin' an even struggle of it. After a bit he says, 'You've recounted, Cherokee, certain dice pecooliarities which hitherto evades my notice, me bein' otherwise engaged. It all shows the wisdom of possessin' a professional kyard sharp, as a yoonit of the body politic. Still,' he goes on, some reproachful, 'when you sees him settin' this trap, why don't you give us warnin'?'

"'Which I would,' returns Cherokee, 'if the stakes is of real valyoo. But thar you be, only playin' for the life of that Cottonwood, an' I sees no call.'

"'To think, Doc,' says Enright, kind o' pensive, as we-all go wanderin' back to the Red Light—'to think of me bein' let in by a babe in arms! An' yet I foretells a brilliant c'reer for Cottonwood. That boy ought to be in Congress right now! Bar-keep'—makin' a sign to Black Jack—'the reestoratives is on me.'"

CHAPTER XIX

TEXAS RECEIVES A LETTER

THIS yere" observed the old gentleman one evening when the talk had wandered to the rival town of Red Dog—"this yere I has in mind, is an occasion when Red Dog, as a yoonit, scornin' the narrow sperit of commoonal rivalry, triumphin' over prejewdices still more narrow, flocks at the call of hoomanity to the Wolfville rescoo. Which it's one of them grand eepisodes that redeems a gent's dwindlin' faith in his kind, an' teaches him, with that wise old longhorn who writ the dramys, how a tech of nacher makes the whole world kin. To be shore, as the final kyards comes slippin' from the box, we never does need Red Dog's aid at all;—none whatever! But that mustn't serve to shift the play. Red Dog takes her p'sition, what Doc Peets calls *boney fides*, an' you-all can gamble your guns, an' throw in belt an' cartridges for lanniyap, Wolfville yields that hamlet grateful credit.

"The beginnin' is one evenin', when a passel of us is hibernatin' about the Red Light, playin' a little bank ag'in Cherokee, more as a excoose for livin' than from any lust of gain. While we're thus dawdlin' along, Peets drifts up from the post-office, with a letter for Texas Thompson.

"'Looks like some lady's openin' a correspondence with you, Texas,' he says, tossin' the missive on the lay-out.

"Thar it is, plain as paint, in fine h'ar-line writin', 'John Thompson, Esq., Wolfville, Arizona.' Right yere let me cut in with the p'inter that, while Texas is 'Texas' to us, his legit'mate brand is 'John.'

"When the letter hits the cloth, Texas draws back same as if it's a rattlesnake. Thar befalls a silence, doorin' which Cherokee turns his box up, showin' play for the nonce has ceased.

"At last, Texas gets his voice: 'It's shore she-writin'!' says he, kind o' gulpin'. 'Gents, I saveys by the feelin' that I'm up ag'inst the awful! It's as though that onvelope harbors a trant'ler! You open her, Doc,' he concloodes, appealin' to Peets.

"While we-all sets back in suspense, Peets t'ars the letter open, an' reads as follows as near as I recalls:

'Dallas, Joone 6.

'Deer husband:

'How can you be so crooel? Thar's no use of you longer hidin' out; I gets your present wharabouts straight, from a sure source who sees you face to face. Oh, that it should be granted a miscreent sech as you to break a heart like mine! Onless I hears from you in a fortnight after you receives this commoonication, I'll shore come where you be in person.

'From your illyoosed but devoted wife

'J. Thompson.'

"While Peets is readin', Texas sets thar never battin' a eye nor waggin' a y'ear. He don't speak for more'n

a minute; it's as if he's thunder-struck. At last he begins whisperin' to himself.

"'Illyoosed wife! J. Thompson!' he says. 'An' my old time wife's name is Jane!'

"Cherokee picks up the letter. Then, tryin' to hand Texas some encouragement, he remarks:

"'This yere's spoorious! It's from Dallas; Texas's former wife has her home-camp in Laredo.'

"'Not necessar'ly,' returns Texas, his voice thick an' husky, an' him makin' a motion with his hand same as if he's wavin' aside false hopes; 'not necessar'ly, Cherokee. It'ud be about her style to go troopin' off to Dallas, that a-way, as more fashionable.'

"'Which I don't see no room for argyooment,' breaks in Enright. 'Thar's the hand-writ, Texas. Cast your optics onto it, an' see if it's genyooine. You shorely knows the lady's signachoor.

"'Which I wouldn't bet a chip on me knowin' nothin'!' exclaims Texas, his feachoors workin' desp'rate. 'Me an' she never carries on no voloom'nous correspondence; an' I couldn't tell her handwritin' from quail tracks. But thar's a sensation yere, gents'—an' Texas thumps his breast—'like a icicle through my heart, which tells me said missive's on the level.'

"'But I don't savey!' returns Enright, waxin' argyoomentative. 'You regales us freequent with alloosions to a divorce. This yere correspondent incrim'nates you as her lawful husband?'

"'Jest the same,' protests Texas, 'she gets that divorce all right, an' is reestored to her maiden name an' all my

cattle. She auctions off the bovines, an' wins out sev-'ral bags of doubloons onder the pretext of alimony. I ain't on to this present racket more'n you be, Sam; but it's obv'ous she's got some new trick up her sleeve.'

"'Mebby', says Boggs, 'this yere lady's gone broke ag'in feathers an' furbelows, an' she's out to bushwhack round an' extort more riches from Texas.'

"'I trusts it ain't no worse,' groans Texas. 'Still, it'ud be more her size, on findin' me free an' havin' a good time, to rope me up an' drag me back into them marital bonds.' Then, castin' a implorin' glance at Enright, 'You'll stand by me, Sam—you an' the boys? You won't let me be took without a effort?'

"'If it was ag'in men, yes,' returns Enright, whose sympathies is all worked up; 'an' though they comes a armed host! But however, Texas, be we goin' to shield you from a lady? Which the mere thought leaves me weak as water!'

"'That settles it!' says Texas, whose cheek while Enright talks turns pale as paper; 'thar's no hope, then! Gents, I forgives both my friends an' my enemies, an' accepts all blame to myse'f. Moreover, I has my refooge. Sooicide is still within my reach, an' no sport who owns a Colt's-45 can be regyarded as without a friend. In matrimony, as in fightin' Injuns, the word should ever be: "Save your last shot for yourse'f."'

"'Texas, Peets breaks forth, plumb enraged, 'you talks like a prattlin' child! Let's meet this involvement clean-strain! Why not face that sooperfluous spouse, an' remind her you're a free, divorced, American citizen?'

"'Doc,' replies Texas, impatient an' queryoolous, 'sech bluffs is puerile. You ain't got no conception of this lady. If she decides to reclaim me, that Laredo divorce won't hold her more'n a cobweb would a cow. You knows Abilene's wife?'—Peets begins to twitch some about the mouth, an' look faded an' oneasy—'Abilene's wife is cup-custard an' charlotte roose to this yere one-time he'pmeet of mine!'

"Enright sighs. 'Doc,' he says, shakin' his gray sagacious head, 'this 'llustrates what I tells you t'other evenin'. We're too much civilized. The male of our species lapses into a handless slave, oncap'ble of his own domestic defence, when he eelim'nates the club from his household economy. Since then he's been plumb powerless to preeserve the fam'ly peace.'

"'None the less,' retorts Peets, 'it befits us, as sports of sperit, to consider means for Texas's succor. I for one shall not surrender him without a struggle. This yere's no child's play an' I fears we're up ag'inst the prop'sition of our c'rreers; for all that we mustn't weaken.'

"By this, havin' recovered some from the first nerve-stampede indooced by Texas' peril, we-all falls to a discussion of what's best to be done. At the outset, Texas raises his shakin' hand to be heard.

"'Gents,' says he, 'let me onbosom myse'f on one more p'int. You may deem me reecreant; but, onder no circumstances, will I meet this lady in j'int debate, or submit to be drug into her presence personal. With this single hold-out, you-alls is free to go ransackin' about in

my destinies with the bridle off, workin' your friendly an' onfettered wills.'

"Thar's a heap of talk. One after the other, Enright an' Peets an' Boggs an' Cherokee an' Tutt an' Jack Moore and the rest gets down their verbal stacks. At the finish, Peets sums up results.

"'It seems the consensus,' says he, 'that mendacity's to be our buckler, concealment our single hope, an' Texas yere has got to go into hidin'. Which concloosion bein' arrived at, the next an' nacheral query is, Wherever is he to hide at? Wolfville won't do, bein' much too obv'ous. Moreover, accordin' to Texas she's equal to puttin' a torch to the camp, an' burnin' it to the ground. I tharfore submits Tucson, as a place of temp'rary retirement for our hunted comrade.'

"'Which Tucson won't do neither,' observes Enright. 'If Texas goes to lurkin' about that closely gyarded meetropolis surreptitious, an' nothin' to explain them furtivities, they'd jest about rope him up for a hoss-thief, or mebby allow he's organizin' to turn off the National Bank. Gents, the thought is barbed, but for myse'f I sees nothin' for it except Red Dog. They're our enemies; but likewise in their loocid intervals, they're hooman bein's. If the naked horrors of this yere sityooation is laid b'ar to 'em, they're bound—an' retain the name of white men—to offer Texas a asylum.'

"'But, Sam,' says Peets, 'Texas, as you seems to ree-'lize, can't go burrowin' in among them Red Dog folks without no prior word. Now whoever's goin' to chip in that word?'

"That's a dooty up to you an' me, Doc,' returns Enright. 'We must bring over the Red Dog chief for a powwow heart to heart.'

"While Wolfville an' Red Dog is commonly hostile, an' on the perren'yal outs, thar's occasions sech as Injuns or us runnin' low as to licker an' the freighters not in on time, when we-all lends each other fraternal countenance. Tharfore the Red Dog chief makes no haughty demurs to a conf'rence, but obligin'ly canters over instanter, with Boggs an' Cherokee, who's sent to fetch him, as a escort of honor; an' all mighty partic'lar an' p'lite.

"As the Red Dog chief swings out o' the saddle at the Red Light, he's certainly a fash'onable lookin' spectacle. His saddle—stamped leather—is gold trimmed, his spurs wrought steel, his guns pearl mounted, while about his sombrero is looped a pound of bullion in the shape of a rooby-eyed rattlesnake with diamond rattles. Also, on his bridle-rein hangs five Apache skelps; an', considerin' that sech mementoes is worth twenty-five dollars per top-knot at the Tucson bank, an' goes as so much cash in transactions involvin' licker or farobank or roolette in any joint in town, we-all nacherally regyards 'em as comprisin' a mighty lib'ral adornment. Altogether, as that Red Dog magnate comes jinglin' up to the Red Light bar, an' Black Jack searches him out a bottle of the best, he's a pageant to do any outfit proud.

"Followin' a mootial round of drinks, Enright an' Peets, with the balance of us mootely backin' the play, imparts what clouds is lowerin' over Texas.

"'An' our idee,' concloods Enright, p'intin' to where

pore Texas is camped off by himse'f, silent an' hopeless that a-way, 'is that most likely you-all gents of Red Dog'll offer him a haven. The lady, who is doo in a week or so, will not, I takes it, stay forever. Pendin' her pullin' her freight, an' while she's rummagin' 'round, would you-all, as a favor to yoonited Wolfville, afford the foogitive a sanctchooary?'

"Which the ready promptitood, wharwith the Red Dog chief acquiesces, is a heap to his credit.

"'Shore,' he says; 'Mister Thompson is not only free of my own personal wickeyup, but I shall tend him as a honored guest. He can go thar onder cover, an' none to molest him or make him afraid. No one'll so much as even think of lookin' cockeyed in his direction. Thar is, however, one su'gestion.'

"Yere the Red Dog chief explains how, as to the mootial dooties of husband an' wife, public sent'ment in his camp is some divided.

"'There is other questions,' he goes on, 'concernin' which all hands hangs together like a brace of six-shooters on a single belt. Considerin' the pecooliar bent of the gen'ral Red Dog mind, tharfore, an' to avoid ferment, I recommends that, instead of handin' it out how Mister Thompson is pursooed by a wife from whom he's escaped, it would be a heap more feasible to let on he's a simple foogitive from jestice. Dodgin' all problems of domesticity an' puttin' it on the broad grounds of him bein' merely a malefactor that a-way, whom they're trying to ketch, you'll shore have Red Dog with you like a landslide.'

"'Which your observations,' returns Enright, 'seems plenty pertinent an' founded in a heap of hoss sense. It only remains to ask what partic'lar felony's most apt to awaken a reesponsive chord in the Red Dog bosom?'

"'If you leaves it to me,' counsels the Red Dog chief, 'I'd onloose the roomer he's bumped off a Mexican. It can be hinted how effete Eastern inflooences has done permeeated in among the Texas public, an' taught 'em to view beefin' Mexicans intol'rant.'

"'But won't their s'spicions begin to set up,' asks Peets, 'when they notes it's a lady? We shore can't hope none to pass off one of her tender sex as a officer.'

"'Which we'll p'int to her bein' a lady that a-way,' replies the Red Dog chief, 'as a sooperb instance of Lone Star chicane. We'll explain on the sly how she aims, after locatin' her quarry, to sign up the folks at Austin for aid. Followin' which, they figgers on prouncin' on Mister Thompson like coyotes on some sleepin' cotton-tail.'

"'The objecks of the meetin' bein' thus satisfactor'ly disposed of, the Red Dog chief takes to reelaxin' round with Enright, Peets an' the outfit gen'ral, consoomin' nosepaint an' becomin' fraternal equal. Texas is brought for'ard an' introdooced; but he's that dazed an' cowed, when he receives them overchoors of safety tendered by the Red Dog chief, Enright's driven to 'pologize.

"'Which you wouldn't know him,' says Enright, alloodin' to Texas, an' whisperin' in the Red Dog chief's y'ear, 'he's so dejected an' overcome since ever he receives that fatal missive. You-all sees how on-strung

he is, an' crippled down in heart? An' yet, pard, I don't exaggerate when I enforms you that as recent as a week ago he could go in, b'ar handed, an' kill his weight in wolves.'

"The Red Dog chief accepts these explanations in a complaisant mood, an' allows he fully onderstands. 'For,' says he, 'while I never has no shore enough wife of my own, I knows gents who has, an' likewise possesses powers of appreciation.'

"Followin' a mod'rate an' mighty cer'monious dee-bauch, the Red Dog chief rides away to his tribe ag'in, and Wolfville bends its brows to details. She'll decend on us by means of the stage, we argues, an it's agreed that Old Monte on the run in, is to make a smoke on the *mesa* at the mouth of the canyon, whenever he's got her aboard. That'll give the camp ample notice, an' Texas can sidle over to Red Dog an' go into secloosion. By way of pre-parin', the very next day a beacon of pitch-pine knots is heaped up on said eminence, ready for the warnin' match.

"Old Monte is puffed up egreegious when he learns. 'An' you bet you can rely on me, gents!' he says, sort o' bulgin' out his chest. 'Your Uncle Monte never fails a friend or lays down on a play.'

"This yere bluff's all right; still we-all don't put so much confidence in the old dipsomaniac, but what we posts the eboolient young sport, who's jest then tryin' to get killed by hold-ups, ridin' shot-gun for the Wells-Fargo people, to himse'f set fire to our *mesa* signal, in case old Monte's too far gone in drink.

"When all's said, however, it ain't beacon fires, nor

yet Old Monte soaked of licker, that gives us most onease. Thar's Missis Rucker, an' Tucson Jennie, an' Faro Nell: —them ladies has got to be squar'd.

"'Thar's no other way, Doc,' declar's Enright; 'we've got to take 'em in on this. Which if we-all don't, with the ardor an' genius for bein' permiscus that is sech alloorin' traits of the sex, they'll jest about side in with this yere deestroyin' angel, an' tell her whar Texas is.'

"'They wouldn't be that treach'rous!' expostchoolates Peets.

"'Not ord'narily,' says Enright; 'but yere the complainin' witness'll be a fellow lady. Onder sech circumstances, you couldn't put a bet on 'em. Our best hold is to side-line 'em with promises, an' hobble 'em with compacts of nootrality, in advance.'

"It takes no end of talk to bring them ladies into line, an' Missis Rucker holds out speshul. She allows she ain't none convinced but what Texas has done wrong.

"'Thar's a preedom'nant streak of villainy,' says Missis Rucker, 'in all men, an' it'll be plenty queer if Texas Thompson proves a exception to the roole.'

"An' yet, my good madam,' reemonstrates Enright, 'it's to one side of your womanly dooties, which is to conduct the O. K. Restauraw in your present admir'ble style. Thar's a adage, "Let every gent kill his own snakes:" an' the same applies to ladies.'

"'In which case,' retorts Missis Rucker, mighty tart, 'whyever be you an' Peets an' the rest of these he-malcontents interferin' to hide Texas from this deserted lady's search?' Then, seein' how nonplussed Enright

looks, she adds: 'However, as you perhaps jestly remarks, my business is runnin' restauraws, not healin' fam'ly breaches; so, if I can an' for this once, I'll stand paws-off.'"

CHAPTER XX

THE FALSE ALARM

THROUGHOUT the followin' two weeks, the pop'lar strain is frightful. Along towards the end, when it's nearin' the hour for the stage to show up, the entire camp takes to scannin' that *mesa* over to the north for signals. One evenin' thar she is, towerin' aloft like a pillar of fire by night an' cloud by day. At the earliest smoke-puff, Texas is in the saddle an' off to place himse'f in the hands of the Red Dog chief as a sacred trust.

"'Boys,' says Enright, deeply moved, 'we ought never to forget the obligation which Red Dog this day puts us onder.'

"The stage comes rumblin' in; but none of us is hankerin' 'round, for we decides it's more sapient to act like we ain't expectin' nothin'. Still, we gets a flash at the lady with the tails of our eyes as she steps out, an' as near as we can count her up she's mighty person'ble. Old Monte confirms this yere belief.

"'Gents, she's a goddess,' he says: that's whatever, she's a goddess! An' sweet? Which honey-suckles is p'isin ivy to her!'

"Not that no one feels bound by Old Monte's commendation, an' him steeped in rum perpetchooal to sech degrees he's devoid of jedgment. Peets, however, makes

a excoose for loafin' over to the O. K. parlor where she's gone, an' *poco tiempo* comes teeterin' back a heap more enthoosiastic than Old Monte.

"'It shore baffles me,' exclaims Peets, 'to guess whatever Texas is thinkin' of when he quits!'

"'Her lookin' like a hooman sunbeam, that a-way, Doc,' urges Enright, 'is mebby her dooplicity. You let her once get her claws on Texas, an' I'll gamble she comes out in her true colors. Did you-all enter into confab with her?'

"'Why yes,' returns Peets, turnin' shamed an' diffident. 'She asks me do I know a Mister Thompson; whereat I nacherally flies to fiction, an' lets on I'm a stranger in a strange land, same as herse'f. Then I advises her to talk to you. To be frank, Sam'—yere Peets adopts looks disgraceful to sheep—'I comes romancin' across right now, at her requests, to ask you won't you appear an' answer queries.'

"'Doc,' says Enright, a heap reproachful, 'do you-all call this bein' loyal? However, let it go as it lays; I shall confer with this lady. Forchoonate it is for the hunted Texas, that thar's one soul in camp who's not to be blandished by no siren!'

"Enright ain't allowed to face them dangers alone, for Peets an' Boggs goes trackin' along at his intrepid heels. The lady is all Old Monte hints at. Not to go holdin' out the trooth, she's that beautiful it's reedic'lous —with big deep eyes an' soft h'ar, brown an' glossy. Thar's tears on her cheeks, too, as she turns to Enright; an' while he braces himse'f, I sees he's shook.

"'Parding me,' says the lady, 'I'm Missis Thompson —Missis Joolia Thompson.'

"Enright roves 'round to Peets with his eye. 'Excoose me, ma'am,' he exclaims, mighty abrupt, 'I'll be with you ag'in in a moment.'

"The lady seems s'prised, like she ain't none convinced but Enright is locoed. However she bows, same as to say, 'Why shore!'

"Enright drags Peets—who as I says is hangin' onto his r'ar—into the street.

"'Doc,' whispers Enright; 'you notes how she declar's herse'f as Joolia an' not Jane?'

"'Not being deef as adders,' returns Peets, 'I does.'

"'Whatever is your deeductions tharfrom?' asks Enright. 'An' remember, this yere ain't no time fav'rable for errors.'

"'With which last bluff I'm in hearty accord,' says Peets. 'Jest the same, Sam, it's plain thar's been a misdeal; this lady ain't scoutin' for Texas nohow; she's layin' for some other Thompson.'

"Enright, who's plumb conserv'tive, an' no one to go followin' off every track he cuts, sort o' hes'tates. 'Mebby,' he says, 'her declarin' herse'f as "Joolia" is a deevice. We must proceed with caution, Doc; we mustn't be betrayed into furnishin' the means of her nailin' Texas on the very nest.'

"'That's troo,' chimes in Peets, growin' doobious ag'in. 'Texas is shore the only member of the tribe of Thompson whoever makes a moccasin track yereabouts.

"Joolia" may be but a trap. Yes, the more I dwells on it, the more I feels she's after Texas.'

"'After Texas?' breaks in Missis Rucker, who with Tucson Jennie an' Faro Nell, an' all in states of excitement, refooses longer to be restrained; 'to be shore she's after Texas! Also, I wants in on this yere talk.'

"'Why, certain, ma'am,' returns Enright, who makes a play at seemin' easy, but succeeds only in bein' feeble a whole lot—'why certain! The Doc an' me is jest on the verge of goin' projectin' round' to get your 'pinions, ain't we, Doc?'

"'To be shore you be!' retorts Missis Rucker, a heap sneerin' and spiteful. 'Which I'll about save you two numbskulls the trip! My 'pinions is that Texas Thompson's statements, about his wife's name bein' "Jane," is one of that reptile's m'licious falsehoods. Havin' deserted this innocent girl, he now takes to lyin' and layin' it all to her. Oh, the perf'dy of man! Which I sees "Wretch" writ on the lineements of that Texas Thompson, the instant he pulls a cha'r up to my dinner table! Jen'—yere she pulls Tucson Jennie for'ard—'is workin' in my kitchen at the time, an' when I comes out for them viands he desires I says, "Jen, if ever a born crim'nal asks for flapjacks, he's in the dinin' room right now!" Don't I utter them precise words, Jen?'

"'Which, Missis Rucker, you asshoredly does,' replies Tucson Jennie, coincidin' emphatic.

"Tucson Jennie then wanders off into copious endorsements of all Missis Rucker says an' all she's goin' to say,

while Faro Nell, who's in rapchoors over the visitin' lady's bonnet, expresses herse'f sim'lar.

"'No one, not a born angel,' cries Faro Nell, wavin' her diminyootive paws ecstatic, 'could possess sech heavenly tastes in hats!'

"Then Missis Rucker fetches loose ag'in plumb passionate an' vindictive.'

"'Sam Enright,' she shouts, 'don't you monsters presoome to ask my he'p in your ornery plots to martyrize this child no further! I'm goin' to tell her whar that miser'ble Texas is.'

"'That's whatever!' screams Tucson Jennie an' Faro Nell in chorus. 'Let's all tell her!'

"'Dan,' whispers Enright, as Missis Rucker and the other two goes p'intin' in to make them disclosures, 'sharp's the word! Pitch a hull onto a pony, quick, an' go tell Texas to make a dash for the Mexico line. It's his last hope.'

"It certainly seems like Missis Rucker owns powers of divination; for, as Enright gives this command, she falls to the r'ar so as to bring all of 'em onder her eye.

"'None of your Apache tricks, Sam Enright,' she remarks, as hard an' brittle as the blade of a bowie; 'Dan Boggs ain't goin' to give no warnin's. Now you three tarrapins mosey on ahead, where I keeps tabs on you.'

"'But you'll let me ask this yere lady about the divorce?' expostchoolates Enright. "It's bloo chips to clamshells, she's in wrong. Maybe Texas ain't the Thompson she's hungerin' for at all.'

"'Not one word, Sam Enright!' returns Missis Rucker, firm as granite. 'You an' your fellow inquis'tor, Doc Peets thar, ain't goin' to torture this bleedin' dove no more.'

"Enright casts a disparin' glance across to the Red Light, from which ark of safety Cherokee an' Tutt an' Jack Moore is gazin' horror-stricken. They can't hear none; but they're cunnin' enough from what they sees not to want in on the hand. Enright seeks to cajole 'em over by beckonin' with his fingers; but they proves too foxey, and stands pat.

"'It's no avail,' says Missis Rucker, 'you makin' signs to them confed'rates of yours. Which you sots will find, before I'm done, that Texas Thompson ain't goin' to lay waste no young life, an' then coldly escape meetin' the injured victim of his wiles. From now on, I takes personal charge of this reyoonion!'

"'Doc,' says Enright, as the two with Boggs marches he'plessly ahead of Missis Rucker, 'at least it's Texas who marries this yere wife of his, not us. He should have remembered that as you sow, so shall you-all reap.'

"Missis Rucker close-herds her captives back into the O. K. House, while Tucson Jennie an' Faro Nell goes an' comes on the flanks, preventin' stragglin' an' cuttin' off escape. It's yere the onexpected gets action. As Missis Rucker an' the others enters the door, thar's little Enright Peets, lispin' and chirpin' away at the vis'tor lady, as pert and sassy as a joovenile catbird. His two short cub-b'ar laigs is spread wide, an' he's rockin' for-

'ards an' back on his fat small feet, like a infant party who's plumb pleased with his p'sition in s'ciety.

"'Oh!' he's a sayin' in his baby way—which he's six the round-up before—'oh! you-all means my Uncle Tommy. Uncle Tommy's gone skallyhootin' over to Red Dog, so's you won't ketch him none. My paw's Dave Tutt; an' he tells my maw all about it. I hears him on'y las' night, when they-all allows I'm asleep. You bet I saveys when not to sleep, as well as any wolf whoever yelps on a hill—I does!'

"'Oh, you sweet, good, dear, cunnin' baby child, you!' says the vis'tor lady, curryin' little Enright Peets' ha'r with her fingers soft as silk.

"'Sam,' says Peets, desp'rately comin' to the front, 'our hands is tipped off by babes, an' it ain't no use to play 'em. It's all up with Texas, an' we might as well go to the diskyard.'

"'Mebby we makes terms,' urges Enright, who by nacher is a badger to hang on, an' swing an' rattle with a prop'sition to the last. 'S'ppose you-all offers her money, Doc. Which if a handful of thousands'll squar' this thing, tell her the camp is yere with its roll to make good.'

"'Money!' exclaims the beautiful victim, whose y'ears corrals the word while she's wildly carressin' little Enright Peets; 'me take money for my desolate heart! I wants my trooant husband!' With this, she slumps off into a gale of sobs, carryin' Missis Rucker with Faro Nell an' Tucson Jennie along.

"Thar's nothin' else to be done, so we organizes into

a sorrowful cavalcade, to journey over to Red Dog, an' witness the ropin' up of Texas. Enright is speshully gloomy, an' makes onavailin' requests of Missis Rucker to let him go weavin' on ahead.

"'I gives you my honor, ma'am,' he says, 'that all I plans is to get Texas's guns. You shorely don't want this yere to end in his se'f-destruction none?'

"'You take a back seat, Sam Enright!' is all he gets from Missis Rucker, who every moment grows more an' more indom'table. 'Which I'm floor-managin' this *baile.*'

"Well, well!"—the old gentleman gave a sigh of relief and proceeded to fill his glass—"it's always darkest jest before the dawn. Also, in the words of the Congo reviv'list, as he tries to quote the poet at the camp meetin', 'God moves in a myster'ous way His blunders to perform.' It's while affairs is thus lookin' murkiest for Texas, that eevents in their courses strikes the onforeseen and glances happ'ly off.

"Two months preev'ous, a weak-faced, cat-chinned, slack-lipped feebleist, who gives his name as Dobbs, drifts into Wolfville; an', because he appears oncap'ble, an' of no consequence in this life, we-all takes a hard forbiddin' look at him, that borders on the threatenin'. The cat-chinned party, bein' plumb timorous, shrinks from among us, an' backs into Red Dog, apparently ketchin' said outfit off its gyard. Thar, by the grace of accident an' what Red Dog overlooks in his appearance, he becomes cashier in a beanery, called the Garfield Restauraw, kept by one Pete Bland, where he makes change an' sorts nickles for his chuck.

"Thar's nothing of the man to this cat-chinned party, an' his best attriboots, perhaps, is a shock of curly ha'r, long enough an' voloom'ously thick enough, to afford nests for forty flyin' squirrels. This yere car'cachoor of a gent is behind his desk in Pete Bland's bean-j'int, when we-all comes sadly troopin' up Red Dog's single street. Likewise his bein' thar is shorely onder the public welfare clause of the constitootion, so far as Texas is involved. The instant our beautiful vis'tin' lady claps her tear-dimmed eyes on him, she gives one heartfelt squawk, t'ars loose from the protectin' pinion of Missis Rucker, an' the next moment grapevines herse'f about his neck.

"'My beloved husband!' she cries, her head on his shoulder, him standin' stock still, with eyes like a mackerel's.

"Peets is first to find his mental feet:—which Peets ondoubted is the briskest sharp west of the Atlantic ocean! 'Go!' says he to Boggs; 'b'ar the gladsome news to Texas!'

"Nacherally confoosion reigns. The Red Dog chief, however, continyoos to be all urban'ty. He draws Enright to one side:

"'Thar's nothin' this chipmunk commits,' says he, tossin' his thumb toward the capchoored husband, 'which onder Red Dog rooles requires lynchin'. None the less, an' by way of compliment to you-all Wolfville guests of ours, if you says the word we hangs him up.'

"But Enright declar's sech moves onnecessary, no p'int of honor bein' involved. 'Moreover,' he observes, 'thar's the feelin's of his wife.'

"'Gents,' says the capchoored cat-chinned party, when he beholds us glowerin' at him plenty baleful—for we're thinkin' of pore Texas's sufferin's—'I pleads guilty to bein' this lady's husband; also, I admits I'm wrong when I assoomes a alias. An' yet, gents, Joolia'll tell you thar's no malignancy in me. I don't smoke, or drink, or chew terbacco, or sw'ar, or go cavortin' about after the sex. In all respecks I'm a mighty moral man.'

"'Which I reckons you be,' comments Enright, plumb severe. 'Morality, that a-way, is freequent a question of health, an' you certainly does seem much too sickly to be sinful.' Then, addressin' the beautiful visitin' lady, who's still looped onto her prod'gal husband's neck, 'Is thar aught in favor of this maverick?'

"'Pore John,' she sobs, 'is one of the best of husbands; except he ain't what you might call se'f supportin' none. Otherwise, he's plumb good.'

"'It's not for me to crit'cise, ma'am,' says Enright, turnin' away. 'This horned toad belongs to you, not me. Only, he ought to be brought to ree'lize, as the exper'ence of the centuries, that it's a heap sight more important in this world, for a gent to make good than to be good; which tenet applies with double force to husbands.'

"'Never you mind, dearie,' coos Missis Rucker, as she an' Faro Nell an' Tucson Jennie gather about, pettin' an' cossettin' the beautiful vis'tin' lady, 'never you mind! You've got your husband ag'in! I was shore we'd onearth him somehow, from the jump.'

"'No voylence,' commands Enright some stern, as

Texas arrives with Boggs, the old f'rocious fire in his ontamed glance, 'no voylence!'

"'Voylence?' repeats Texas, full of bitter scorn at the idee. 'Gents, I'm a artist of revenge. This craven has caused me agony ontold; but what then? Shall I down him—an' him a married man! Never! Sech steps would be weakness—blind, witless weakness, not vengeance. No; I shall let him live on a husband. An' when she embarks for Tucson with him, I'll ride by the side of the coach, not as a gyard, not to keep him from escapin'; but for the priv'ledge of gloatin'—of solacin' my harrassed soul with savage gloats.'

"'Cherokee,' observes Boggs later, when him an' Cherokee is makin' a mootial round-up of results, 'do you-all remember them closin' remarks of Texas'? Now an' then, when somethin' intervenes that a-way, to lift one of his griddles, I ketches fiery glimpses in Texas of some of the worst elements of a fiend.'

"'Which once he's roused,' returns Cherokee, shakin' his head, 'you bet Texas is a mighty invet'rate form of gent.'"

CHAPTER XXI

THE JEST OF TALKY JONES

"DO I believe in this yere Christian Science?" My aged philosopher looked up to repeat the question. The magazine, which he held in his hand, carried a bitter attack on Christian Science, its founder and all who embraced the one or followed the other. "Well, no," he continued; "I can't say I goes with it tamely from soda to hock; but I believes it some. One thing shore"—shaking the magazine—"I ain't none in favor of harrassin' the deeclinin' years of a lady, jest because we don't agree. Speakin' for myse'f, personal, I don't favor harrassin' any lady, no matter who she is or what's her little game. It ain't my system, me holdin' that ladies has enough to struggle ag'inst as mere ladies, without some he-profligate seekin' to heap their burdens higher.

"Reecurrin' to Christian Science, my jedgment's with it every now an' then. I believes for example that you-all can up an' think yourse'f sick when you're well. But I finds myse'f hesitatin' 'round between a balk an' a break-down when I ondertakes to assoome that you can think yourse'f well when you're sick. In sech events I calls in Doc Peets, an' falls back on drugs entire.

"In Tennessee, when I'm a yearlin', old Missis Grimshaw lays in bed for years, allowin' she can't walk none. She'd set up, an' try on bunnets, an' buy frocks, an' trail out after the fashions, same as if she's goin' to take in all the infares an' soap b'ilin's an' sociables an' quiltin' bees an' huskin' frolics along the 'Possum Trot. But jest the same she never budges out o' bed; holdin', as I says, that her laigs ain't no more use that a-way than a couple of corn-stalks.

"Sis Grimshaw keeps up this fiction about them laigs for seven years, when one day the hired girl drops a skillet of red-hot fat, an' sets the dug-out afire. Thar-upon old Sis Grimshaw comes b'ilin' out from between the blankets, an' runs a mile an' a half like a jackrabbit. Which this yere dash down the pike brings her to the near-est neighbor. That's as far as she canters; she cripples down right thar. An' as soon as ever old Grimshaw can round himse'f up another habitat, she piles into bed ag'in instanter, an' never does get up no more. Now a dose or two of Christian Science would mighty likely have fetched Sis Grimshaw to her feet. It's a case of where she's well, an' only thinks she's sick.

"But take the time we-all lynches B'ar Creek Stanton: Do you reckon B'ar Creek would have beat that lariat-windmill game the stranglers opens on him, by merely thinkin' his neck ain't been stretched none? Skurcely! It marks the difference between a theery an' a condition. B'ar Creek confronts a condition; Sis Grimshaw's up ag'inst nothin' worse than a theery. In her case, Chris-tian Science beats the play too easy. That occult branch

of hooman learnin', however, would have found things plenty changed, if it had stacked in ag'inst that illness of B'ar Creek's. No amount of thinkin', whether Christian or scientific, can mod'rate the hangin' feas'bilities of a rope an' a windmill in exact proportions.

"Thar's bounds to the power of hooman thought, same as thar is to the range of a rifle. Thought'll only carry so far. You-all, by thinkin', can't keep two an' two from makin' four, or hocus them honest noomerals into makin' five. The good book tells of the faith that moves mountains; but thar's nothin' in that holy bluff which preecloodes picks an' shovels as a deetail. Shore, thar's a faith that moves mountains; still, you can make a swell bet it ever preecedes them changes in the scenery by layin' in a stock of foose an' powder an' diamond drills. Christian Science, same as every other science, is like the limb of a tree. It'll hold, if you don't go coonin' out too far. Over-play, an' down you go to the ground, hurtin' or not hurtin' yourse'f, accordin' as you've been perchin' low or roostin' 'way up yonder.

"Let me reepeat, son, thar's a limit goes with every hooman game. I reads where some sun-kissed sport waxes that extravagant he gives it out cold a day'll dawn when a gent'll live always, an' thar'll be no sech thing as death. When a party takes to solacin' himse'f with dreams as rannikaboo as that, he's locoed. To talk of no one dyin', is to talk of no one bein' born. Either that, or get ready for a final crush to which sardines will seem as hermits. That's whatever! you'd read of them diminyootive little fish as reclooses. That anti-dyin'

sport has followed off the wrong trail. Life is like a dance hall; an' we'll nacherally keep on dancin' an' dyin', until the floor-manager—whoever he is an' wharever he is—orders on the last walse, an' winds up the *baile* with the final call, 'All prom'nade to the bar of eternal jestice!'

"That's the way I wants the game played, too. I wouldn't live a minute onless I was shore I could die. Which if some angel was to prounce down on me right yere, with the news that I'm goin' to live always, I'd drop dead in my cha'r. Considerin' my years, I'm some rugged; but if ever it gets proned into me, as a fixed belief, that my grave ain't goin' to be digged none an' I'm yere to stay, I'll rot down right thar."

The old gentleman paused to pour out a drink; plainly his philosophy had made him dry. I took advantage of the moment's silence. Had he experienced aught in Arizona that exhibited the supremacy of mind over matter?

"Which I've beheld a party skeered to sech extents it turns his ha'r white as paper. Will I reelate partic'lars? Nothin' easier. The story 'llustrates the perils of practical jokin', 'speshully when it's too practical.

"The West has an acoote sense of yoomer; but if I'm ever called on, to confer with any gent who's figgerin' on crossin' the Mississippi, I'll shore advise ag'inst him becomin' jocose. More guns have cracked, an' more folks gone shoutin' home to heaven in the smoke, as the frootes of bein' witty that a-way, than can be p'inted to as the harvest of hoss stealin', or stickin' up stages, or

any other strickly legit'mate avenoo of swellin' a graveyard.

"It's prompt on the discov'ry of ore in the vicin'ty of Wolfville, that Talky Jones comes rackin' in from the Tin Cup district, which region of mines lies some'ers over towards the Gunnison country. Bein' a cattleman, I saveys nothin' of minin', more'n to hanker 'round the rim of one of them orifices they calls a shaft, an' look on a lot. But I knows Talky, same as does everybody else in Wolfville, before that verbose cimarron is present in our midst a day. Thar's folks who could out drink or out dance or out gamble Talky, or lay way over him in sundry other fields of hooman endeavor; but, at bein' simply volyooble, he leaves the ablest of us miles behind. That's why he's called 'Talky.'

"Texas Thompson allows that if he himse'f is gifted with half Talky's powers of conversation, his Laredo wife who soos out the divorce, would have been subdooed into a different lady.

"'She despises me,' says Texas, 'because she out-talks me. Now if I'm only possessed of Talky's flow of words, I'd have shore swept her off her verbal feet, an' landed her gaspin' but inarticyoolate on the banks of domestic dispootation. She'd have been too busy, savin' herse'f from bein' drowned in the currents of my eloquence, to think of sep'rations. Likewise, she'd have loved me a whole lot; for sech is female nacher. All you has to do to hold a lady's heart, is lay back ontil she boards her long suite, an' then cut loose an' beat her to a standstill.'

"Talky ain't been with us a week when he enlists at-

tention by the effervesence of his sperits. He's one of them buoyant souls, that comes tiptoein' along with a stingin' lizard they've hived for sech speshul occasions, an' drops said reptile into a gent's pocket, him bein' preeockepied about somethin' else. Or ag'in, on observin' some party wropped in sleep or licker or both, they'll slide a horned toad down the back of his neck.

"Not that Talky always gets away with his antic an' lightsome bluffs onscathed. Once when Boggs is pourin' out his reequired forty drops in the Red Light, Talky comes Injinin' up from the r'ar, plannin' some hylarious outburst. He don't take the trick; Boggs gets a flash of him in the lookin' glass back of the bar—bein' a watchful sport, that a-way—an', instead of tossin' the nose-paint down his throat, he tosses it over his shoulder into Talky's eyes.

"Ever get a glass of licker in your eyes? No? Well you ain't missed nothin'. It's one of them experiments that's a heap sight better read about than ree'lized. I passes through some sech ordeal a long time ago in Dodge, an' for a poignant second I figgers it's the s'loon took fire.

"That time Boggs out-manages Talky, Enright can't reefrain from rebookin' the latter.

"'It's with no desire, Talky, to make you ondooly proud,' says Enright, after that yoomerist ceases howlin' an' dancin' an' rubbin' his eyes, 'that I congratchoolates you on livin' into middle life. With your pecooliar talents for witticisms, it's nothin' short of mir'cles that years ago you ain't been killed.'

"These yere strictures, comin' from Enright too, sobers Talky down a heap; tharafter he confines his gayeties to tenderfeet, an' don't practice 'em none on us orgi'nal Wolfville wolves.

"Except for his irreepres'ble appetites for practical jokin', thar's not much fault to be found with Talky. As a minin' gent he's shore industr'ous; an' that he's broke an' out o' *dinero* when he strikes camp don't weigh ag'in him none, since bankruptcy is the normal state of prospectors. He goes to knockin' about in the sityooation mighty reedundant, an' in less'n ten days he stakes out a mine. Then he invents one of them dead-falls called a stock company, an' borrys money of Cherokee Hall to deevelope his claim. Cherokee, turnin' farobank like he does, has more free money than any other gent in camp; I reckon now his roll's as good as sixty thousand dollars. He peels off five thousand for Talky; an' Talky hocks all of the company's stock to make good.

"'What's the difference?' returns Cherokee, when Tutt lets on he's seen the last of that five thousand. 'Thar's nothin' like promotin' home industries. Talky's goin' to spend every splinter of it yere in town, an' soon or late it'll all get changed in across my lay-out ag'in. Pendin' which, you-all don't want to overlook the fact, Dave, that I've got said stock.'

"'Which *we've* got said stock,' chips in Faro Nell, from her look-out stool, correctin' Cherokee. 'Ain't you an' me partners?'

"'Right, Nell,' says Cherokee; 'half the bank-roll's

yours. Also t'other half's yours, whenever you signs me up to that effect.'

"Talky takes Cherokee's five thousand, hires a peasant from Red Dog of the name of Chicken Bill, an' away goes them two mavericks, pick an' drill an' dynamite an' windlass, borin' their egreegious holes into the bosom of the ÿ'earth. Bein' started, they sticks to their diggin' like a brace of badgers. When him an' Chicken ain't diggin' their hole, the eboolient Talky is p'ramboolatin' an' pervadin' 'round, from the Red Light to the O. K. House, an' from thar to the dance hall, as full of fun as a Virginny Reel.

"It ain't sayin' too much to put it that Talky gains in public esteeme as time goes on. He calls his mine the 'Anna-ann Marie,' after his daughter who he says is at boardin' school in Denver, gettin' her horns knocked off. Talky allows he'll have her visit him, as soon as ever the exam'nations is through, an' the poopils counterbranded into grades above. Anna-ann Marie'll then be footloose an' free to come. When we learns about Talky's girl, our good opinions goes soarin' higher still.

"'Only,' says Boggs, 'I don't see how Talky can so lack in se'f respect as to prance 'round, playin' his lowdown reedic'lous jests, him the parent of a eddicated daughter like this Anna-ann Marie. Which if it's me now, I'd never crack my face with a grin, I'd be that plumb dignified.'

"'That's whatever!' says Tutt. 'Speakin' as the author of little Enright Peets, I want to say it abates my

native friskiness two-thirds, me fearin' to set that angel child a gala example.'

"Talky an' Chicken Bill has sunk their shaft mebby it's fifty feet, when thar comes rattlin' into town a sallow-seemin' young person from the far East. This yooth hands out his title as Dobson Clay Dusenberry. After gettin' him to repeat it several times, we yoonanimously decides to call him 'Gooseberry Ben' as easier.

"Which this Gooseberry fledglin' don't dally 'round none, but comes to centers prompt. He informs us that, havin' money of his own, he's out to invest in mines. In a mood of proodence, he's reesolved to first learn all thar is to know as a shore-enough miner; he's anxious to dig an' drill an' blast an' perform 'round in a mine, same as though he ain't got enough riches to buck ten-cent chuck-a-luck.

"Harborin' these yere horny-handed ambitions, it falls in nacheral enough that, before second drink time the first evenin', Gooseberry's neegotiatin' away his liberties with Talky, an' that mine owner enrolls him as aide to himse'f an' Chicken Bill.

"Next mornin' Gooseberry surges forth in rust-colored overalls an' wammus; an', *poco tiempo,* him an' Talky an' Chicken Bill goes cavortin' out to the Anna-ann Marie.

"'Sech a romantic name!' is what I hears Gooseberry say, as the three disappears.

"The Anna-ann Marie is the longest part of a mile from camp, so none of us knows personal jest what takes place. But this is what Gooseberry tells Doc Peets, when Peets is standin' over his lowly couch at the O. K.

House, givin' him stimyoolants an' tryin' to cool down his nerves.

"'At the su'gestion of the malignant Talky,' explains Gooseberry, 'him an' me deescends into the shaft, leavin' the vulgarian Chicken on the surface. We went down in a bucket, Chicken onwindin' us from a rickety old windlass.

"'Once at the bottom, Talky an' me with sledge an' drill perpetrates a hole, me holdin' the drill. When the hole meets the tastes of Talky, he puts in a dynamite cartridge, connects it with a long five-minute foose, an' packs it in an' thumbs it about with wet clay.

"'This accomplished, I'm hauled to the surface by Chicken. I adds my strength to the windlass; Talky climbs into the bucket, lights the foose, passes the word, an' is wound to the top by me an' Chicken. We then drug the windlass aside, covered the mouth of the shaft, an' scampered for refooge permiscus.

"'At the end of five minutes from the time Talky lights the foose, an' mebby three minutes after we-all takes to hidin' out, the shot explodes with a deefenin' report. Tons of rock shoots hundreds of feet into the shrinkin' air! It's all mighty impressive, an' gives me a lesson in the awful power of dynamite. I'm a heap pleased, an' cannot but feel I'm shore learnin'.

"'Followin' the blast, Talky an' me ag'in reepairs to the bottom of the shaft. Cl'arin' away the deebris, an' sendin' it up an' out by the bucket, we resoomes work with sledge an' drill.

"'It's now an' yere the monster Talky begins to put

into execootion a plot he has formed ag'inst me, in the carryin' out of which the barbarous Chicken lends his felon aid. You must remember that ontil now I has perfect confidence in these yere ghouls.

"'"Which I never sees no tenderfoot," begins Talky, "who goes rompin' along like you do at this business!"

"'This encomium ain't on the level; the murderer is fattenin' me for the sacrifice.

"'"Looks like you're born to be a miner," Talky goes on, "an' I'd be doin' wrong to hold you back. Yoosual I wouldn't feel jestified in lettin' no tenderfoot fire a shot till he's worked three months; but you're different. You has a genius for minin'; it comes as easy to you as suckin' aiggs! Sech bein' the case, I'm goin' to let you-all fire the next shot yourse'f."

"'Nacherally I feels pleased. To be allowed to fire a shot my first day in a shaft I esteems a honor. It'll be somethin' to write home about to my folks.

"'Talky says he'll put in the shot—one of giant size. I sees the hercoolean explosive placed in the hole. Talky attaches the foose, an' thumbs the clay about it same as prior. Then he turns to me.

"'"After I'm hauled up," he says, "an' me an' Chicken's organized, you clamber into the bucket an' light the foose. Followin' which you raises the long yell, an' me an' Chicken'll yank you out. But be shore an' light the foose. Thar's nothin' so plumb aggravatin' as waitin' 'round up top for half an hour, an' no cartridge goin' off. Speshully when she goes off after you've come pirootin' back to locate what's wrong. This yere ought

to be a proud, high moment for you!—firin' a shot the first six hours you're a miner!"

"'Talkey ascends; when him an' Chicken's at the windlass, he shouts down: "All ready below!"

"'I'm in the bucket. At the call I scratches a match, an' touches off the foose. It sputters an' smudges an' sparkles with alarmin' ardor, throwin' off a shower of sparks like fireworks!

"'"H'ist away!" I yells.

"'At this signal the villains runs me up half way; thar they come to a dead halt, leavin' me fast in the shaft. From what appears, both Talky an' Chicken have abandoned the windlass, an' are locked into a personal altercation. I knows nothin' of their trouble; all I hears, as I swings thar over deestruction, is a storm of curses an' threats. Then they takes to shootin', presoomably at each other.

"'"Which I'll blow your heart out!" I hears Talky roar.

"'"You mis'rable oppressor of the toilin' masses," Chicken roars back, "I'll shore shoot you off the map!"

"'It's "bang! bang! bang!" in a perfect network of murderous confoosion.

"'Doc,' continyoos Gooseberry, after gulpin' down a teaspoonful of Old Jordan, 'I leaves you to imagin' my feelin's. My alarm is without a fence. I'd seen one cartridge go off; thar I be, swingin' twenty-five feet above a still heavier charge, awaitin' eternity, while them fiends in hooman form are fightin' out some infamous feud of their own. I cannot deescribe my agony! The

foose is spittin' fire like forty dragons! The shaft is choked with smoke! Thar am I, frantic, ha'r-hung, he'pless above annihilation, an' them blood-hungry monsters bootcherin' one another aloft! Either from the smoke or the excitement, I faints away.

"'On comin' to, I finds myse'f outside on the grass, while Talky an' the disrepootable Chicken is lookin' on an' laughin' themselves out o' one fit into another over the joke. Thar had been no shot placed in the hole; the heartless Talky palms it, an' carries it with him to the surface. Thar's nothin' but the wet clay an' the foose.

"'At my nacheral inquiry, made in tones as weak as water, as to what it all means, them miscreants breaks out laughin' afresh, an' allows it's part of the preescribed 'niation of a tenderfoot.

"'"It'll give you nerve!" says Talky. "Sech plays is calk'lated to put heart into you, an' do you good."

"'After which, him an' Chicken falls to renooed laughter, said mirth, an' their asshorance that the drinks is on me, bein' all the reedress I gets.'

"In Arizona every gent is the sole jedge of his own jests; wharfore, concernin' them adventures of Gooseberry, no public steps is took. Still, when Texas Thompson advises that sufferer to frame himse'f up with a shot-gun, an' down an' bury both Talky an' Chicken in the Anna-ann Marie, an' even goes so far as to borry a fowlin' piece from the Wells-Fargo people, wharwith to make the play, the idee finds tacit approval.

"Nothin' comes of it, however; Gooseberry urgin'

that sheddin' blood is reepugnant to his nacher. He declar's he'll seek other avenoos of revenge.

"'For vengeance I shall have!' says he.

"Meanwhile, as evincin' how he's shore been harrowed up a lot, Gooseberry's ha'r turns white as milk.

"Talky exults inordinate in them crooelties he levels at Gooseberry; far from feelin' repentance, he allows it's the hunkiest joke he ever pulls off. He laughs every time it crosses his mem'ry; an' he buys gallons an' gallons of rum, keepin' his appreciation tharof at featheredge. Black Jack himse'f admits that a few more sech joyous outbursts'll be the makin' of the Red Light."

CHAPTER XXII

THE CONFUSION OF TALKY

WHO'S that poet sharp who says laughter goes before tears, an' sunshine preecedes a shower a heap. Whatever's his name an' brand, I'm yere to remark he makes a center shot. Right while he's consoomin' rum an' nursin' his ongodly glee, Fate is heatin' the reetributive pitch for Talky in manners onforeseen.

"Talky's Denver daughter comes dancin' in; which the advent of that damsel may be regyarded as the beginnin' of the return play. This Anna-ann Marie girl is a comely, corn-fed maiden, an' the credit'blest thing about Talky of which any of us ever hears. Seein' she's the only soul in camp onto whom he ain't onloaded the tale, Talky straightway tells her of the jest he plays on Gooseberry.

"Anna-ann Marie looks serious an' plenty shocked.

"'Why, paw! she says; 'however could you-all be that callous!'

"'Callous!' retorts Talky, all puffed up with vanity. 'Child, you're Pap ain't callous, he's jest cunnin' —cunnin' as a pet coyote.' Then he p'ints across the street to Gooseberry, where that invalid's potterin' about on two canes, him bein' as yet all on-

strung. 'See them ha'rs the color of snow? I regyards that milk-white top-knot as a triboote to my powers as a wag.'

"'Don't he look interestin'?' says Anna-ann Marie. 'Them snowy locks shore makes him the image of Monte Cristo!'

"Of course no one saveys who this yere Monte Cristo is, leastwise no one only Peets, but none of us is that blinded we can't read a kind of tenderness in the glances of Anna-ann Marie. As she gazes across at Gooseberry, cripplin' 'round on his two sticks, her eyes lights softly up like the windows of a hurdy-gurdy on the evenin' of a fandango. Talky is that besotted he don't notice; but the rest of us shakes our heads an' smiles. Already we perceives, that on the principle of him laughin' best who laughs last, affairs may yet manage themselves so as to give Gooseberry the high ground.

"That evenin', in the O. K. dinin'-room, Anna-ann Marie gets acquainted with Gooseberry, Missis Rucker floor-managin'.

"'Seein' you-all folks,' says Missis Rucker, who's a stickler for the propri'ties,—'seein' you-all folks is goin' to be more or less elbow to elbow over your *chili-con-carne*, you shore'll feel freer that a-way if you knows each others names. Miss Jones, Mister Dusenberry. Gooseberry, this yere's Talky's darter, Anna-ann Marie.'

"Events commences to pile up. Between Anna-ann Marie an' Gooseberry, it's a case of mootual admiration from the jump; they simply falls together like a shock of oats. An', when you reflects how she's plumb

idle, while he's broke in his nerve an' honin' for sympathy, it's all easy to onderstand.

"Also, Anna-ann Marie begins to broaden her visitin' list. In the days which ensoos, when she ain't h'antin' amic'bly about with Gooseberry, she an' Faro Nell is chatterin' away together as sociable as bloo jays. Them maidens gets as thick as thieves.

"That thar is vis'ble feachures to the 'comedy'—as Peets calls it—bein' played before our eyes, finds proof in a reemark of Boggs. He's talkin' to Tutt:

"'Dave,' he says, 'I leaves it to you, as a married man, if that Anna-ann Marie an' Gooseberry ain't fallin' into love!'

"'Sech,' responds Tutt, 'is the onbiased findin' of my wife, Tucson Jennie; an', in them honied matters of the heart, Jen never fails of locatin' every bee-tree in the woods.'

"'Well,' says Boggs, 'I argues as much from Gooseberry goin' about constant, grinnin' eediotic. With nothin' whatever to grin at, he'll plant himse'f for hours an' grin at a mark. I calls Doc Peets' attention to it, thinkin' Gooseberry's intellects has pulled their picket pin an' he's goin' locoed. "It's only bliss," says the Doc. "Gooseberry's in love."'

"'Which the Doc ought to know,' responds Tutt. 'If thar's a gent in Arizona, upholstered mental to read every sign an' signal smoke of hooman sentiment, it's Doc Peets.'

"Affairs swings along in this way most a month, Anna-ann Marie an' Gooseberry sunshinin' 'round one an-

other, an' Anna-ann an' Faro Nell colloguin' among themselves girl fashion. No; Talky don't wake up. Days he's down in the shaft; evenin's he's too busy cel'-bratin' that jest of his, which so triumphantly skeers up Gooseberry.

"One day Faro Nell, Anna-ann Marie an' Gooseberry convenes speshul, an' has a powwow. No one considers it as more'n the yoosual gossip of yearlin's, ontil Faro Nell skips over to the Red Light to see Cherokee.

"'About you an' me bein' partners that a-way?' says Faro Nell, like she's askin' a question.

"'Shore!' says Cherokee, in the tones of a gent who agrees to everything in advance.

"'Then paw over that Anna-ann Marie stock,' says Faro Nell. 'Yereafter it's to be mine entire.'

"'Shore!' says Cherokee; an', takin' the stock from the drawer of his faro table, he tosses her the bundle.

"Two minutes later Nell an' the stock is back with Anna-ann Marie an' Gooseberry, an' that convention of three is resoomed.

"The followin' day but one, Nell with Anna-ann Marie an' Tucson Jennie goes headin' for Tucson. The next day Gooseberry, lookin' more ecstatically eediotic than common, lines out sim'lar.

"'Doc,' says Enright, glancin' up at Peets from his licker mighty benignant, 'this yere's gettin' some intricate, no?'

"'If it ain't I'll j'ine the church!' says Peets, plenty emphatic.

"'My wife Jen rides herd on the racket as a chapperoney,' observes Tutt, kind o' pompous.

"'Chapperoney!' exclaims Boggs. 'Which I reckoned I'm onto all the brands on the lingual range, but that's one I can't read.'

"'Dan,' retorts Tutt, a heap spleenetic, 'how often does I tell you you ought to take a term or two at night school? A chapperoney, in any social break, is same as a look-out or case-keeper in farobank. She tabs the kyards as they comes out, sees to it that all bets is paid, an' speshully she's watchful that folks, crim'nally inclined an' surreptitious, don't get away with no sleepers.'

"Boggs looks dazed, an' turns implorin'ly to Texas Thompson. Texas reepulses him a heap f'rocious.

"'Don't say nothin' to me!' cries Texas. 'As one who has suffered by wedlock, I refooses to converse on any married-people topics.'

"'Married-people topics!' repeats Boggs, more an' more fogged up. 'Texas, either me or you or some gent else is gettin' batty.'

"Talky shows in the door jest then, an' nothin' more is said.

"'Finest girl in the world, that Anna-ann Marie!' says Talky presently, shovin' the bottle. 'She sees a good deal of s'ciety in Denver, an' Wolfville strikes her as a trifle slow I s'ppose. Yearnin' for meetropolitan action that a-way, she allows she'll go squanderin' over to Tucson. But she'll be back ag'in, gents, when she's got her play-spell out. An' by the way, that Anna-ann Marie claim of mine is goin' to be the min'ral marvel of

Cochise county. From the ore me an' Chicken oncovers to-day, the valyoo of that property'll need seven figures to express it. Gents, take a drink on the Anna-ann Marie. Barkeep, you hears my gentle voice!'

"Jack Moore has been tackin' up a notice on the Red Light door, usin' the butt of his gun for a tack-hammer. As Talky alloods to the Anna-ann Marie, Moore sings out to him:

"'Speakin' of that prospect of yours, Talky; yere's a small jimcrow publication which ought to rivet your attention.'

"'Whatever is it?' asks Talky, goin' to read the writin', glass in hand.

"'Which it sounds to onprejewdiced y'ears,' says Jack, 'like a call for a annyooal meetin' of the stockholders.'

"Thar it is, in frigid black an' white, summonin' a meetin' of the share-holders of the Anna-ann Marie mine, to be held in the wareroom of the New York Store two days away.

"'Bull snakes an' blizzards!' says Talky, as he reads it; 'whatever does this portend?'

"Talky heads for Cherokee, an' deemands light.

"'I'm some in the dark myse'f,' says Cherokee. 'But of course, Talky, you knows that note for the five thousand is overdoo an' onpaid two weeks?'

"'What of it?' returns Talky. 'You-all don't aim to t'ar into me like a iron-hearted yoosurer, do you, an' swipe all that Anna-ann Marie stock? Don't tell me you're that rapacious; I won't believe it.'

"'Me rapacious?' replies Cherokee, meek as Mexican sheep. 'Personal, I've been backed plumb out o' the play. It's Nell who's your reemorseless cred'tor. As to what is that young business lady's intentions, all I knows is I hears her say she's out to perpetrate a huge jest on you-all, with which you—as a born wit—would be deelighted to a frazzle.'

"Talky turns white an' red an' green an' bloo, an' then settles down to yellow.

"'This yere's a trap!' he shouts.

"Cherokee represses Talky with upraised palm. Then he searches out a 9-inch bowie from some'ers back of his neck, an' sort o' dictates at Talky with the p'int.

"'I don't want to discourage you,' says Cherokee, fixin' Talky with a eye as gray an' keen as the bowie he's toyin' with, 'but before you romances along too far, it's right you should be warned. It's a voylation of the Wolfville rooles to go animadvertin' on Nell. Be proodent, tharfore; a breath ag'in Nell means the loss of your y'ears.'

"Talky, speakin' conversational, begins to back like an overbitted pony. That comb'nation of gray eye an' gray bowie has him buffaloed.

"He gasps out: 'Shorely you'll control her?'

"'Control Nell?' an' Cherokee smiles a wise smile an' shakes his head. 'Talky, you asks the clay to control the potter. Nell's a star, sky-born an' imperial; an' as sech loominary it don't reequire no astronomer to onderstand she's plumb above control.'

"Talky, findin' he's up ag'inst it with Cherokee, goes totterin' back to that notice, an' re-reads the same.

"'I shall refoose to attend,' says Talky, after a pause. 'It ain't legal none; I'll go in the air, take to buck-jumpin,' an' deecline to lend my presence to sech outrages on property rights.'

"'You won't attend none?' says Jack Moore, mighty grim. 'You'll attend, you bet, or it'll become my dooty, as kettle tender for the stranglers, to make you some hard to find.'

"That social party comes rummagin' along back from Tucson, an' in doo time the annyooal meetin' of the share-holders of the Anna-ann Marie gets together. It's certainly a most amazin' round-up. That stock's been shuffled an' cut an' dealt, an' sent cirkyoolatin' all about the board, ontil mighty near every gent in camp—to say nothin' of Tucson Jennie, Missis Rucker an' Faro Nell—has ten shares each. As for that Gooseberry, he bursts on mankind as the pride-swollen an' plootocratic possessor of nine thousand nine hundred and ten shares, bein' what's left. Every share-holder is present, solemn as prairie dogs—all except Black Jack, who depyootizes Gooseberry to be his proxy.

"'I don't see what I'm doin' yere,' says Talky, sneerin' bitterly, when the lay of the land is made plain to him; 'I ain't got no stock.'

"'All the same,' breaks in Boggs, 'you're goin' to stay a whole lot. We needs your counsel. You've been delvin' in our mine practical, an' we-all stock-holders wants a report as to the condition of our property.'

"'That's whatever!' chimes in Texas Thompson. 'An' see that said reeport is plenty succinct; we'll shore resent bein' hoodwinked.'

"'Merely in a mood of idle cur'osity,' observes Talky, waxin' sarkastic, 'I'd like for to ask a cotton-headed numbskull yere, who's called Gooseberry, how he comes to own the heft of the Anna-ann Marie? Hopin' his feeble fackulties is equal to a answer, I r'ars back an' waits for his replies.'

"'Which I pays some'ers 'round the exorb'tant sum of five thousand dollars for it,' says Gooseberry, 'the same leavin' quite a hole in my patrimonial pile. An' now fellow share-holders,' he goes on, wavin' his hand p'litely about the room, 'with your consent I'll ask my peevish interlocyooter concernin' matters of more personal sort. Would you, Mister Jones'—yere he dom'nates at Talky with his fore-finger—'assoomin' me to crave sech boons, consent to my marryin' your daughter in bonds of holy matr'mony?'

"As Gooseberry gets off this bluff, he gazes fondly down on Anna-ann Marie, where she's tucked herse'f in between Faro Nell an' Missis Rucker, demure as a mountain quail.

"'You marry my daughter!' shouts Talky in scorn. 'A snow-capped dolt talk of clamberin' to the heights of becomin' my son-in-law! I'd sooner see Anna-ann Marie the spouse of a Mexican!'

"Why, Paw!' says Anna-ann Marie, reproachful.

"'What do I tell you!' exclaims Gooseberry, lookin' triumphant at Faro Nell an' Anna-ann Marie. 'Didn't

I have this yere old serpent guessed out right?' Then, comin' back to Talky ag'in: 'So shore be we of what's your hellish p'sition touchin' our happiness, that me an' Anna-ann Marie forestalls refoosal by takin' each other for better an' for worse two days back in Tucson. Do you-all see this?' an' Gooseberry pats his frosty skelplocks. 'Which I vows I'll have a vengeance ag'in you, an' now I've got it.'

"'Vengeance!' whispers Texas Thompson to Boggs. 'He seizes on the hymeenial torch, sets fire to his final chance of happiness in this life, an' calls it vengeance! Dan, this Gooseberry's a howlin' eediot; Peets ought to procoor a writ *de loonatico* an' lock him up.'

"'Do you-all mean,' demands Talky, glarin' at Gooseberry, 'that you two is husband an' wife?'

"'That's what the sky pilot tells us,' returns Gooseberry; 'an' I gives him the price of a stack of bloos for the information. Likewise these excellent ladies'—p'intin' to Nell an' Tucson Jennie—'is thar, backin' the play in person; an', while they're blinded by tears at the time, I makes no doubt they witnesses enough to guarantee the trooth of what I states.'

"'They're shore wedded,' puts in Tucson Jennie, 'or I'm no jedge of nuptials. One thing though,' an' Jennie looks at Missis Rucker, who snorts her endorsements, 'I insists on that preacher sharp leavin' out "obey".'

"'Gents,' says Talky, appealin' 'round the room mighty abject, 'you've heard what this pinhead Gooseberry says. The mud-blooded creature is actchooly my son-in-law! I could have stood up ag'in bankruptcy,

but I wilts before disgrace. Proceed, gents; pronounce my final doom.'

"'Let me pronounce it,' says Gooseberry; 'I owes him that much for shatterin' my constitootion, an' changin' my auburn locks to linen in the springtime of my days. Mister Jones, me an' my wife, *nee* your daughter Anna-ann Marie, figgers by way of weddin' trip on startin' back tomorry to see my folks. They'll dote on Anna-ann Marie, my folks will! My idee in takin' in these sundry an' var'ous share-holders whom you sees assembled, is that doorin' our absence, an' to protect their own interests, they'll take measures to keep you hard at work deevelopin' the Anna-ann Marie. Of course you'll get wages; which the same I leaves my fellow share-holders to fix.'

"'But I won't reemain none!' breaks in Talky, plenty veheement.

"'You'll stay,' retorts Boggs, 'if we has to hobble you. Do you reckon you're goin' to abandon our property to deestruction, jest to satisfy a pique?'

"'You-all may hold me captive,' returns Talky, dark an' sullen; 'but I won't do a lick of work. I informs you savages right yere that I'm not goin' to be first robbed an' then enslaved.'

"'Won't work?' speaks up Missis Rucker, as hard an' raspin' as filin' saws. 'You won't be fed no grub then.'

"'Come, Talky,' observes Enright, his voice an' manner kindly, for he's beginnin' to feel sorry about Talky's troubles; 'cheer up! This yere sityooation ain't so rock-ribbed! I wouldn't let it sour my nacheral feelin's!

A sport of your onyoosual sense of yoomer ought to see its comic side. Besides, it's cattle to catbirds your son-in-law, Gooseberry, 'll split up the Anna-ann Marie with you, when him an' his bloomin' bride returns.'

"'I don't want to seem no niggard,' observes Gooseberry, 'but permit me to say I shall not commence my wedded life by enrichin' my wife's parent *gratis*. I'll go this far, however: When I comes trackin' in from my trip like a giant reefreshed, if the old man's been labor'ous an' faithful, I'll let him into the Anna-ann Marie, mod'rate, on the ground floor.'

"'Be you, too, a stock-holder?' asks Talky sadly, of his daughter Anna-ann Marie.

"'Why yes, Paw,' she returns. 'My husband, Dobson Clay Dusenberry, endows me with a even half of them nine thousand-odd shares at the altar. But certainly, as a dootiful he'pmeet I allows Dobby dear to represent. You knows the sentiment, Paw:

> "'Two souls with but a single thought,
> "'Two hearts that vote as one.'

"It's a week later, an' thar's the afternoon lull in the Red Light.

"'Don't your figger, Nell,' asks Cherokee, 'that after all you plays it some low on Talky, equippin' that son-in-law Gooseberry to round on him an' run over him like he does? Which pore Talky ain't been the same man since; it's left his sens'bilities all spraddled out.'

"'Your mean old Talky party gets nothin' but what's comin' to him,' returns Faro Nell. 'That Gooseberry

boy's entitled to rep'rations for what Talky makes him suffer; tharfore I advises an' assists him in a Christian way. Then see how plumb happy it makes him an' Anna-ann Marie! As for your mis'rable Talky, I'll wager them ten shares I reetains, that the next time he goes p'intin' out to be funny an' concoct a joke, he'll shore play said witticism with a copper on.'"

CHAPTER XXIII

SOAP SUDS SAL

"WEDLOCK that a-way," remarked my venerable friend, replacing his glass on the table—the night was raw and damp—"wedlock that a-way as I shows you frequent comes mighty near amountin' to a mania with Doc Peets; not for himse'f of course, but other people. It looks like he can't see a lady single a minute without tryin' to saw her off on some ongyarded gent, him holdin' wedlock to be the only legit'mate means of perpetchooatin' the race.

"For myse'f, while I sees much in said latter bluff to recommend it, an' give it dignity as argyooment, I refooses to follow Peets when he talks of makin' marriage compuls'ry.

"'Yes sir,' says Peets, bein' at the time hooked up in heated pow-wow with Texas Thompson, who holds other views—'yes sir; if I was business manager for the public, I'd offer a bounty for the skelps of bachelors, same as wolves. Which every bachelor is a suspect, like a fox in a barnyard, an', if necessary to arouse his sense of dooty, I'd shore employ drastic means.'

"'But Doc,' Texas protests, 'when you takes to tossin' off threats about onmarried gents, that a-way, you goes too far. Plungin' along in this yere fashion,

bridleless an' onhobbled, whatever's to become of them constitootional tenets concernin' life, liberty an' the pursoot of happiness?'

"'Liberty!' exclaims Peets. 'You-all tarrapins mustn't make the error of runnin' liberty into license. No gent is at liberty to become a public menace; an' sech, I asserts onhesitatin', bachelors to be. Which you speaks of the mar'tal condition, Texas, as if it's chains an' bondage! Who, I asks, is freer than a married man?'

"'Sech her'sies, Doc,' replies Texas, waxin' petyoolant, 'almost inclines me to lapse into one of them disrepootable exhibitions known as a weepin' drunk. Ladies is by nacher despots; wedlock's only another name for slavery; they calls 'em husbands, but they're reely serfs.'

"'Dave Tutt ain't no serf,' says Boggs, cuttin' in on the dispoote; 'an' he's shore married to Tucson Jennie a whole lot. Dave's a husband, but jest the same you bet! he's boss of his ranch.'

"'Dan,' retorts Texas, turnin' on Boggs some weary, 'in them oncalled for outbursts, you merely demonstrates your ignorance. Which you'd better take a good hard look at Dave. After you studies him awhile, you'll notice he ain't boss none, he simply has lots to say.'

"'To be shore,' says Peets, comin' to the conversational front ag'in, 'when I announces that I favors a bounty for bachelors' skelps, it's to be onderstood thar's exemptions. Medicine sharps, like me, ought not to be permitted to marry, belongin' to the public, as I yeretofore explains. Then thar should be a age-limit, which lets

out folks sim'lar to Enright. Also, in instances like yours, Texas, when a gent has been hon'rably mustered out by a competent triboonal, same as in them Laredo divorce proceedin's—I'd bar sech folks. Thar, however, I draws the line. When I tracks up on some sprightly party like Dan yere, it'ud become a case of "Die dog or eat the hatchet!" I'd shore make that single-footer get a wife, or get plumb off the y'earth.'

"'All the same, Doc,' says Texas, sullen an' resentful, 'onderstand me as stringin' my bets the other way. I sees nothin' in your claims; none whatever! Wharin does a married gent lay over a gent who ain't?'

"'Wharin?' repeats Peets, never pinchin' down a chip. 'Why, a married gent's got a bachelor skinned forty ways from the jack! As I urges former, a single gent is like a statchoo without a ped'stal; he needs a wife to elevate him, an' keep him morally perpendicyoolar. Not,' goes on Peets, 'that I would have you dedooce, Texas, anythin' derog'tory to yourse'f from my remarks, which are to be took in the abstract. As to yourse'f, personal, I entertains the same profound respects I does for Dave. Jest as I cel'brates Dave as a hero, so I rev'rences you as a martyr to wedlock. Both is entitled to honor; for a hero is but a martyr who succeeds, while a martyr is only a hero who fails.'

"'Doc,' cries Boggs, evincin' high excitement, an' graspin' Peets by the hand mighty fervent, 'while I won't say I wholly seizes your meanin', I'm yere to declar' them sent'ments plumb corruscatin'!'

"Which I don't myse'f wonder at Boggs. Peets

shore is the most gifted sharp whoever spreads his blankets in Arizona.

"While my own feelin's," continued the old gentleman, replenishing his glass, "don't keep exyooberant pace with Peets concernin' matrimony, neither be I sech a pess'mist as Texas. Of course, I ain't married none myse'f, an' never is; still I thinks I makes cl'ar to you yeretofore how it shouldn't be charged ag'inst me none as a dir'liction. No gent can be more sincere than me, in them sev'ral footile attempts I makes to round myse'f up a he'pmeet. But each time, as says the actor sport over to the Bird Cage Op'ry House, 'thar's another Richmond in the field,' an' it certainly looks like I ain't speedy enough for competitions. After my noomerous failures, I decides that mebby if I could only cross up with some lady who ain't seen no gent for a year I might in the course of another gentless year or two cajole her, an' succeed in winnin' out her heart. However, ree'lizin' that ladies answerin' that lonesome description is bound to be plumb hard to find, I never makes no pecooliar effort to cut the trail of any sech exotic, but lets life go as it lays.

"It's mighty mortifyin', too, when you comes to think of it, an' perhaps it's in a onconscious effort to rescoo my vanity that a-way, I long ago adopts a belief that gettin' married, like winnin' at farobank, involves no question of personal merit, but only luck. Thar's old Missis Barndollar, back in Tennessee when I'm a yearlin': Sis Barndollar's as bitter as a pignut an' got a face like one; an' yet she ups an' accyoomulates

seriatem—as Peets would say—seven husbands. It looks like folks simply gets into the habit of marryin' Sis Barndollar! She goes troopin' to the altar so often she w'ars a path!

"Seven times, mind you! for I counts them licenses myse'f, framed an' hangin' on the wall. She c'llects an' keeps 'em same as a Injun does skelps. The other six husbands is all planted in a row, in the Pine Knot graveyard by the 'Possum Trot; an' final they adds number seven to the list. Sis Barndollar cashes in herse'f shortly after, an' they gives her the right of the line. It's only jestice they should. When the last trump sounds an' graves gives up their dead, thar'll be Sis Barndollar at the head of her own private procession, ready to lead them seven on high as yeretofore below.

"If I'm called on for a opinion, I takes it Peets an' Texas is both of 'em part right an' part wrong. Ladies, as wives, breaks about even. They're like the kyards in a deal-box; no matter how they're riffled an' cut, as many falls to lose as falls to win. So troo is this that the preacher sharp, when tyin' 'em together as husband an' wife, always hedges the play by sayin' they 'takes each other for better or for worse.' An' I'm free to observe, sech holdouts is jest'fiable, an' but commonest proodence.

"Wedlock, from the gent's standp'int, ain't always a onmixed vict'ry. Avoidin' any ref'rence to Missis Rucker—for which esteemable lady I owns the utmost regyard, an' whose horns by any brash remarks I should shore regret to draw my way—let me, as calk'lated to

sustain my contentions, alloode briefly to Soap Suds Sal. Thar's a lady ag'inst whom nothin' can be uttered. An' yet this is what comes off.

"Soap Suds Sal ties down in bonds of matrimony a boisterous young cow-puncher, one Riley Brooks. When she ropes him, an' drags him up to be branded marital, Riley's of as vol'tile an' effervescent a temp'rament as any catbird teeterin' on a bough. I sees him myse'f, at the cattle tournament which Wolfville an' Red Dog pulls off conj'intly over by the Cow Springs, throw a rope one hundred and five feet an' fasten, tie down a steer—an' stand at its head, loop free an' hands up—in twenty-two seconds by the jedge's watch, an' win a Chihuahua saddle, worth ten head of fat cattle, by ridin' successful the most voylent mustang that ever bites a Spanish bit, or goes sunfishin' through all the mazes of a fit of genyooine old fashioned, heart-felt, stiff-laigged, worm-fence buckin'. An' yet, in the teeth of all them feats, after he's a married man I meets Riley collectin' shirts for Soap Suds Sal to wash; an', more'n that, he's collectin' them garments afoot.

"No one ever makes out where Riley's lightness goes to; but vamosed it shorely is. From the most gala boy that ever tightens a back cinch or spurs his cayouse in the shoulder, jest to see it arch its back and buck, he slumps down dull an' inert, with no more elastic'ty of soul to him than a bag of putty. Yes sir; moral, mental an' phys'cal, Riley once he's married shows nothin' short of four inches out o' plumb! An' while I mustn't be constrooed as sayin' that no gent could have espoused Soap Suds Sal an'

kept his balance, what I does assert is that sech is the portrait of Riley Brooks.

"Speakin' of Peets's invet'racy about marryin' off them single ladies whom he comes across, this yere Soap Suds Sal is most likely the only one he ever passes up. Not that he goes to the diskyard as to Sal, by virchoo of him bein' timid; Peets, in a matter involvin' principle, is that clean strain he'd break a span of bobcats to harness, or perish in the attempt. My own idee is he's merely se'fish, an' wishes to preserve Sal in them shirt-washin' fields, wharin she's shore onclassed. As it is, however, she don't require Peets's aid. Movin' husbandward in her own good time an' way, she decides on Riley; an' tharafter the kyards so to speak is shuffled an' dealt, pore Riley picks up his hand as a married man, an' feebly plays the same as though the whole racket, from soda to hock, is foreordained.

"You-all remembers about the Washwoman's War? An' how, as the upshot of that embroglio, which promises for a space to spill the best blood of Wolfville, an' from which nothin' onder the genius of Enright could have led us forth, Benson Annie weds Mister French, while Sal is left to slop suds, slam flat irons an' burn shirt-bosoms, the oncrowned tub-queen of the camp. Follow-in' that emyoote, things soon settles to orig'nal levels. Boggs's laig gets well of Tutt's bullet, an' the triumphant laundress allooded to proceeds to kyarve for herse'f a nitch in commoonal economy, an' conquers commoonal respect as 'Soap Suds Sal.'

"Sal is a large able lady, 'most as big as Boggs, an'

can heft a wash-boiler, overflowin' of soap-suds an' duds, off the stove, as easy as ever Missis Rucker hefts a fryin' pan of salthoss. Also, she keeps to herse'f, an' never comes pesterin' no one except, some Chink breaks in from Tucson with a slant-eyed purpose of inaug'ratin' a tub-trundlin' opp'sition.

"When any sech shows up, Sal takes her hands out o' the suds, rolls down her sleeves, puts on her shaker, an' hunts up Enright.

"'Do I get any protection?' she begins. 'Am I to become the victim of every opium slave that takes a pigtailed notion to invade this yere camp? Is thar manhood s'fficient in Wolfville to stampede a heathen of the Orient, who's aimin' a blow at the American fabric, or must I put him over the jump myse'f?—an' me a he'pless lady!'

"While Sal's goin' on, Enright beats the air with his hands, dumbly 'pologizin' an' invokin' Sal's forbearance. When he's got her ca'med, he calls out to Jack Moore.

"'You sees, Jack, the trouble this onprotected child is in. Won't you be so kind as to take your guns, an' disperse that obnoxious son of Confoosius who's annoyin' her?'

"Ten minutes later, Jack's bullets is cuttin' the grass around the slippers of the offensive Chinaman, who's burnin' up a mile of ground in gettin' away. Or mebby Jack's took a half-hitch round his saddle-horn, with that sooperfluous Mongol's cue—same as when you-all 'tails' a steer or a pony—an' is yankin' him a mile or so out o' camp at a hand-gallop. There yere latter proceedin's

is speshul shore to act fav'orable, inasmuch as they not only serves as a convincin' hint to the Chink that he's a ondesir'ble citizen, but likewise s'fficiently indicates the course we think he better pursoo. Restored to her sov'reignty of the tubs, an' hummin' a little toone, Sal goes peacefully back to her shirt-burnin', suds-sloppin' an' iron-slammin', heart at ease, the light of a serene contentment shinin' in her azyoore eyes.

"Which matters goes rackin' along in this yere satisfact'ry style for moons, an' no gent ever dreams of marryin' Sal. If I'm driven into a corner an' my bread took away, in order to force from me a explanation why Sal is thus immoone, I'd say we respects her too much. Moreover Sal's too big an' strong to wed. When a lady can pick up a side of beef an' hang it on a hook, an' not even check the flow of her conversation, it's more apt to excite admiration than su'gest nuptials. Then ag'in Sal is heard to say she looks on old Rucker as a model husband, a statement calk'lated to make a gent of wisdom lean up ag'in somethin' an' think. However, to give Sal doo credit, she never for a instant conducts herse'f like she harbors designs of matrimony, none whatever!

"Old Monte one time goes whisperin' yere an' thar that Sal's done took to lookin' at him in a meanin' way; an' he even lets up on rum, allowin' he's goin' to need all his wits an' resolootion. But the camp gives no creedence to these yere intimations, some holdin' 'em to be lies, an' others—they bein' impressed by Old Monte quittin' nosepaint, a thing in itse'f thartofore onthinkable in his case!—deemin' 'em but a yoonique form of deli-

rium treemers, brought on by a change of licker which the Red Light makes about that time.

"Whether or no Sal gets to adore Riley, is a problem which has ever been beyond my depth. Ondoubted, when she declar's herse'f in favor of marryin' him that a-way, an' carries him off to the altar, it's nacheral to assoome she does. As ag'inst this, whyever does she in cold blood redooce him—an' him as buoyant a cow puncher as ever sings 'Sandy Land' or breaks a bronco to saddle!—to the water-drawin' levels of a laundry, an' a perepatetic skirmishin' for foul shirts? As a play, I'm yere to confess it's got me swept plumb off the board. All I lays down for shore is, she does it; an' thar I leaves you to go romancin' 'round in the tangle, onwindin' reasons for yourse'f."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WOOING OF RILEY

THIS yere Riley ain't no novelty to Wolfville, an' him an' his blanket mate, Four-bar Bob, has been some frequent in the scenery for more'n a year. This latter sport is older than Riley; an', since he's got a bunch of cattle over by the Tres Hermanas marked with that brand, we calls him 'Four-bar' Bob. He says he buys the cattle; but thar's cause to suspect he ravishes 'em from a passel of Mexicans down south of the line, an' never pays a soo markee. Still, so long as they ain't been cut out of the herds nor driven from ranges of no *Americano*, sech surmises causes no excitement our side of the nation'l boundary. Four-bar an' Riley, as a method of livelihood, mootually works these yere Mexican cattle, with now an' then a week off as bronco busters, breakin' bands of ponies for Enright an' the rest of us at three dollars a head.

"Riley, personal, is a shallow feather-headed form of yooth, an', while he's some given to noise an' licker, most folks—if you bars Black Jack—likes him. Black Jack is among the few who nurses aversions for Riley. An' I must say Black Jack has his grievances, Riley cherishin' a weakness for smashin' glasses on the floor by way of roundin' off a drink.

"One day a party drives over from Tucson, introo-

ducin' a patent fire extinguisher, said contraption consistin' of glass globes, about the size of cocanuts, filled with flooids guaranteed to give a conflagration heart-failure. Thar's a sign goes with 'em which reads, 'To be used in case of fire!' as puttin' a casyooal an' oninstructed public onto their virchoos, should any blaze break loose.

"Black Jack looks 'em over plenty thoughtful, an' buys twelve. He fits 'em up in their wire rack on the Red Light wall, an' changes the notice onder 'em to read:

"'To be used in case of Riley.'

"'Thar,' says Black Jack to Cherokee, who's considerin' these yere preecautions; 'Enright won't let me beef Riley, an' so I allows, if he ever shows up in this s'loon ag'in, to chunk him up with these a lot.'

"When Riley learns of them Red Light prep'rations, he's plumb hostile an' talks of paintin' up for war. Enright an' Jack Moore, however, convinces him it won't do none; an', since later they floor-manages a peace between him an' Black Jack—Riley promisin' to omit glass-smashin' from his repertory—them fire missils never works their way into action.

"While folks likes Riley, his pard Four-bar Bob is far from bein' a pop'lar idol. Not that he ever starts anythin', but because he always looks as though he's goin' to. He's one of them sour, dark, oncommoonicative sports, whose atmosphere, as Peets calls it, is nacherally repellant. I myse'f figgers thar's a streak of Injun in Four-bar, in which eevent your not likin' him none is explained. Cross-breeds that a-way is always vicious

an' onsatisfactory, an' no gent of experience ever takes his guns off while one's in sight.

"No, I'm onable to fathom what's wrong with cross-breeds; an' yet somehow some'ers they shore hides the seeds of disaster in their constitootions. Sech puzzles in hoomanity is plumb hard to savey, an' for myse'f I only gets at it this yere fashion. Take a proper deck of fifty-two kyards; a handful of gents'll play all night with 'em, win an' lose their thousands, an' never no cloud to rise in the sky. Let some sech element as a fifth ace creep in, an' it's a stack of yellows to a white chip thar's a killin'. It's the same with people. Some folks it looks like is foaled with a fifth ace in their make-up—preedestines storm-centers from the jump!

"An' sech is Four-bar Bob. You-all could smell trouble off him same as you smells a storm in its approach; which is mighty likely why no one goes hankerin' an' honin' for his s'ciety. That is no one except the eboolient Riley; I must say Four-bar an' Riley gets along together as comfort'ble as two peas in a pod. Mebby Four-bar reelly likes Riley; even the most ornery is obleeged to dote on somebody.

"Riley makes the front for himse'f an' Four-bar, what times business commoonications is necessary between Wolfville an' themselves. Four-bar hardly ever shows up. Also, no one so far as I hears—an' my y'ears is some voloominous, not to say acoote—as touchin' them absences, lodges any complaints.

"Riley is one day meanderin' about, an' nothin' on that vacant mind of his more'n livin' till tomorry.

Because he's over drinked a little, he feels excursive, an' in his wanderin's breaks in on Sal, as she's puttin' a batch of bloo shirts through a second suds. Riley plants himse'f on a upturned tub, an' surveys Sal sort o' lack-luster, grinnin' meanwhile a p'intless eediotic grin. Sal in return regyards Riley mighty severe, an' with mebby a glint of inquiry in her bloo eye.

"'What for a j'int is this?' asks Riley after a while.

"Sal sees Riley no end of times, but yeretofore she takes no notice of him. It's a big chance if Riley don't blunder into her laundry that time, an' give her a chance to look him over an' mebby get idees, all might yet be well. But sech is fate; Riley goes pirootin' along in, camps down on a tub, takes to makin' imbecile demands an' playin' so to speak with fire.

"'What for a j'int is this?' Sal repeats. 'Which it's a laundry. An' onless you comports yourse'f plenty genteel, you'll get a smoothin' iron at your head!'

"Nothin' more comes off; Riley an' Sal stares at one another mootely for a space, after which Riley pulls his fog-enveloped freight.

"But the thing don't end yere. Riley goes back; an' goes back ag'in. In fact he keeps on goin' back constant for somethin' like two months. Meanwhile, Sal takes to ironin' the buttons off everybody's shirts, an' burnin' holes into them articles of apparel with flat-irons doorin' fits of abstraction, an' Enright an' Peets puts two an' two together an' decides she's in love. Not that they appears overjoyed, the same bein' the only time.

"After two months of these yere attentions on Riley's

part, things culm'nates; either him or Sal proposes, an' Riley staggers forth an' informs the public he's engaged. As sol'mnizin' that betrothal, he gets deeply an' deejectedly drunk.

"Texas Thompson is speshully worked up, an' asks Riley is he actin' of his own free will.

"'No!' cries Riley, sheddin' tears.

"'Then,' says Texas, 'don't you do it none. You write her a letter pleadin' intox'cation, an' declar'in' all bets off. An' mind, don't you go trackin' round in person none to say "good-by!" Which I'm fool enough to do that once, an' I gets married before I leaves the house. Take warnin' by me! Write your far'wells; it's what post-offices is for.'

"Riley thanks Texas, an' allows he's too drunk to write at that preecise moment, but'll seize on his first sober interval so to do.

"As near as we learns, Four-bar is of one mind with Texas, an' opposes Riley's nuptials.

"'An' why?' asks Riley, as Four-bar lectures him on the eenorm'ty of him gettin' married that a-way.

"'Why?' retorts Four-bar, floppin' a flap-jack in the fryin' pan, him cookin' supper at the time. 'Because, for sech a rattlewitted fly-by-night as you-all to have a wife is onnacheral.'

"'Now I don't look on it in that light,' says Riley. 'Which to me the scheme presents some fasc'natin' feachoors.'

"Four-bar an' Riley bickers all through supper; an' then, findin' no progress is made, Four-bar beats Riley

over the head with the fryin' pan ontil he agrees he'll stay single.

"'Sw'ar!' says Four-bar.

"'I sw'ar!' says Riley—'I sw'ar to remain as single as possible! I hopes to j'ine the Injuns if I don't!'

"Four-bar's hostil'ty to Riley becomin' a husband takes sech shape the next day, that he brings that lover into town, to tell Sal he's decided otherwise. The two keeps their errand a heap secret; no one has the least guess. The fact that Four-bar looks oncommon morose an' sour means nothin', sech bein' his normal expressions. They goes to the Red Light, subscribes for a few drinks, an' then decides, as Texas advises that time, to write Sal a letter.

"Thar's a hitch, however; Riley can't only write a little bit, an' Four-bar none whatever. They seeks to engage Black Jack as a amanyooensis, but that careful barkeep declines an the grounds of forgery. At last Riley allows he'll go over to the post-office, win out some letter paper, an' do the best he can.

"While Riley's engaged upon these yere cler'cal labors, Four-bar continyoos to reefresh himse'f about the Red Light. This is error; for the nosepaint reeacts on the Injun in him, an' the next news he's in the saddle, chargin' his pony up the street, whoopin' an' whirlin' his gun on his finger.

"In a sperit of studied contoomely, Four-bar takes to waltzin' his bronco all over the sidewalk. Enright, who's in the New York Store, has his attention drawn to this solecism out of the window.

"'Whoever is this party, Jack,' he asks Jack Moore,

'who's thus rappin' his horns, an' stampin' an' pawin' for trouble out yere on a hoss?'

"'That's Riley Brooks' partner,' says Jack; 'it's Four-bar.'

"'Well, whoever it is,' says Enright, goin' back to his purchases, 'I hopes you'll take steps to redooce his frivol'ties to minimum. Which he's becomin' far too broadcast that a-way.'

"By this time Four-bar's grown as mad as one of them hydrophoby polecats. All the Apache in him comes to the top. At sight of Jack he throws his pistol on him; but Jack is thar with the drop, an' gets the first shot.

"The bullet goes through Four-bar's laiggin', an' downs his pony.

"As the pony falls, it pins Four-bar to the ground. He's game though; an' while every shot's a miss, he lets loose all six loads as he lays thar. Jack himse'f is quite as busy, an' much more ackerate, his fifth gettin' Four-bar through the lungs.

"'Which I never could shoot none with a pony on my laig,' says Four-bar, an'—a splash of blood on his moustache—sinks back dead.

"Riley, over in the post-office, hears the bombardment, swings onto his pony, an' comes a-runnin'. It's all over when he gets thar; perceivin' which, he brings his bronco 'round on its hind hoofs for a get-away. Jest as Riley doubles the corner, Jack's last bullet splashes on a silver dollar in his coat pocket. That's the final shot; Riley digs in his spurs, hits a few high places in the topography, an' is half way to the Tres Hermanas.

"Sal, who's over in her laundry, sees Riley an' Four-bar as they rides in. When minute after minute goes by, an' no Riley, she takes it so much to heart she burns the bosom out of Peets' Tucson shirt. Which this yere vestment is white; an' Peets wears it when he visits Tucson, so as to give them prairie dogs a proper est'mate of whatever Wolfville is. It's a thing of the past now, however—rooinated complete!'

"Which the smoke of battle's hardly blown aside when Sal, backed by Missis Rucker, brings Jack to bay.

"'You're a bright execyootive!' cries Missis Rucker, in tones of fierce contempt. 'Whatever do you mean by chasin' Sal's swain out o' town for?'

"'Yere I be,' says Sal, her eyes flashin' a heap om'nous, 'an' never once sees my Riley for two days! Then, when at last he does come driftin' in, you devotes your eediotic energies to shootin' him all up. It'll jest be my luck if he never does come back no more! Which my pore heart tells he'll seize on your reedic'lous gunplay as pretexts for breakin' our engagement!'

"Between us, I never sees Jack so took aback! He makes every effort to excoose himse'f.

"'Of course, Sal,' he says, 'you onderstands that what I does I does offishul. An' yet I'm free to say—confessin' the same as a fault—I gets that wropped up in my dooties, I plumb forgets them cer'monies you plans with Riley. Otherwise I'd have downed his pony with that last cartridge, an' turned him over to you. But perhaps it ain't too late.'

"'Which you'd shore better say it ain't too late, Jack

Moore!' says Missis Rucker. 'You go capture that Riley boy now, or don't you ever come back! I certainly never sees no sech spoil-sport since a yard of cloth made a frock for me!'

"Enright comes up, an' seeks to console Sal. 'This is plumb onforchoonate!' he says; 'but you knows the aphorism, ladies: Troo love never runs smooth. However, be of cheer! It's diamonds to dumplin's Jack yere runs that recreeant lover down.'

"'Which I'll get him,' says Jack, mighty desp'rate, 'if he makes a trail as long as the wanderin' Jew!'

"Jack cinches a saddle onto a swift hoss, an' hits the trail for the Tres Hermanas. Two days later he rides back with Riley, tied hand an' foot, wrist an' fetlock, on a lead pony. Riley's arm is broke, an' he's suffered sundry contoosions.

"'He goes scamperin' off like a jackrabbit,' explains Jack. 'His pony, too, is some sudden for so little a hoss; I chases him a mile before I'm clost enough to alloode to my errand. At that he won't stop none; so, bein' I'm in ropin' distance, I tosses the loop of my lariat over him, an' yanks him back'ards out o' the saddle. He hits the grass a little hard, I fears; an' it's fractured him a trifle, an' mebby bruised an' abrated him some. Still, thar's plenty of him left to marry.'

"'If you-all needs me,' says Riley, who's been listenin' a heap impatient, 'what's the matter of sayin' so? But no; you goes to ridin' an' ropin' an' ropin' an' ridin', an' confoosin' me all up to sech extents, I nacherally seeks safety in flight. This idee too, of lassooin' a party,

same's if he's a calf, is plumb onlegal; an' I'll gamble on it! Gimme my guns!'

"'You'll get your guns,' says Jack, 'when you're a married man, an' not ontil.'

"Which I more'n once observes that thar's nothin' like bone-fractures an' gun-shot wounds to bring out the sentimental in a gent. A couple of bullets, planted proper, in the hooman frame, 'll set the patient to composin' verses. Likewise, wounded gents is partial to ladies speshul. It falls this way in the case of Riley, who the moment he's hurt takes to Sal like a kitten to a hot brick.

"An' Sal reeciprocates. As soon as ever Peets gets the bridegroom spliced an' splinted together, Sal goes bearin' him off to Tucson for the sacrifice.

"No, Riley don't make no objections, but lets on he's plumb pleased.

"'Which wedlock tickles me to death!' he says.

"But somehow I don't know! If it does, he's shore got a funny way of showin' it. Moreover, it looks like Riley's new-found bliss about jolts his intellects off their centers. He's certainly been draggin' his mental lariat ever since them expousals, an' most of the time a-steppin' on the rope. It's all mighty piteous an' pathetic! The last time I sees pore Riley, he's drinkin' plumb inord'nate; an' runnin' nose an' nose with Old Monte, in efforts to determine that grand problem, which so many has tackled an' none has solved, of how to stay drunk an' reemain sober at one an' the same time."

CHAPTER XXV

THE COPPER HEAD

BACK in Tennessee," observed the old gentleman, with an air of meditative retrospection, "when in boyhood's happy hour I attends services in them sanctchooaries that's scattered up an' down my ancestral 'Possum Trot, I frequent hears the preacher sharps refer to 'the cunnin' of the serpent.'

"As a child I allows that the same, with said pastors, is a mere figger of pulpit speech; the more since what serpents I scrapes pers'nal acquaintance with—an' I gen'ally scrapes it with a elm club—proves plumb doltish that a-way, an' thick. Them reptiles when tested displays about as much cunnin' as Thompson's colt, which animal is that besotted it swims a river to get a drink. Later on, however, as I b'ars interested witness to the wile an' guile of the Copper Head, as he salts the Golden Roole felonious, an' depletes Bass Drum Bowlby of forty thousand in cold dollars tharwith, I recalls that phrase of them divines as something which, if applied to the Copper Head, would shore have been plenty jestified.

"The Copper Head preceeds Bass Drum into camp by about a week. In trooth, he's adjourned to Red Dog before ever Bass Drum shows up, an' ain't livin' none in

Wolfville at all. Not that he's so feeble-minded he prefers Red Dog, only Cherokee Hall alarms him so he don't dare stay.

"What rouses Cherokee is this: While not sayin' nothin', the Copper Head is guilty one evening of a deal of onnecessary starin' at Faro Nell, as that young priestess of fortune sets lookin' out Cherokee's play. Of a sudden, at the close of a deal, Cherokee turns his box up, an' briefly excooses himself—he's onflaggin'ly p'lite, that a-way—to what gents is buckin' the game. He crosses over to the Copper Head, planted by himse'f down near the end of the bar.

"'You don't gamble none?' remarks Cherokee, givin' the words a upflourish to show it's a question.

"'No,' replies the Copper Head; 'I'm averse irrev'cable to takin' chances.'

"'Then,' returns Cherokee, mighty bitter, 'don't look at that young lady none no more. Which in so doin', whether you're wise to it or no, you're takin' the chances of your life!'

"As Cherokee vouchsafes this admonition, an' by way of urgin' it home on the wanderin' fack'lties of the Copper Head, he cinches onto that serpent by the y'ear —the same bein' some wide-flung an' fan-like—an' leads him to the Red Light door. Once arrived at that egress, Cherokee desmisses him outside by a foot in the small of the back, said Copper Head flying through the air in the shape of a hooman horse-shoe.

"'Now, don't return!' cautions Cherokee, as the Copper Head, who lands all spraddled out in the dust of

the street, picks himse'f up an' goes limpin' over to the O. K. House; 'I've took a distaste ag'in you, an' the less I sees of you the longer you're likely to last.'

"'That Copper Head,' says Boggs, as Cherokee gets in back of his box ag'in, 'is ornery to the brink of bein' odious; an' yet, Cherokee, I don't much reckon he's starin' at Nell in a sperit of insult. My idee is he's simply eediotic.'

"'Mebby so,' returns Cherokee, some grim; 'we-all wont argue that, Dan. Let me add, however, for the illoom'nation of all concerned, that if eediocy's to be a defence yereafter for crim'nal roodness, why then I'm some eediotic myse'f—on certain subjects. One of 'em is Nell, as that Copper Head'll shore find out a heap, should him and his red snake eyes take to transgressin' ag'in.'

"Snappin' the deck he's rifflin' into the deal box, Cherokee addresses the circle about the lay-out:

"'Now, gents,' he says, his urbanity restored, 'when your hands is off your stacks, we'll resoome the exercises of the evenin'. Thar you be!—Trey lose, nine win!'

"'Which in all my born days,' wails the Copper Head, complainin' to Rucker of the voylent usage he receives—'which in all my born days thar's never a more onprovoked assault! Cats may look at kings!'

"'That cat-an'-king bluff,' returns Rucker, mighty onsympathetic, 'may go in the far East, but it carries no weight in Arizona, none whatever! Before you-all insists round yere on lookin' at any kings, you better be shore an' have, besides a workin' knowledge of the gent

who's holdin' 'em, somethin' vergin' onto a full hand yourse'f.'

"No, nothin' comes of Cherokee's rebooke, the Copper Head takin' it plumb moote an' quiescent, that a-way. Snakes may be p'isen, an' frequent is, but thar ain't a ounce of war in a wagonload. However, since early the next mornin' the Cooper Head pulls his freight in favor of Red Dog, I nacherally infers said eepisode to be the cause.

"While the Copper Head done packs his blankets over to Red Dog, an' tharfore the disgrace of his citizenship belongs rightful to that collection of vulgarians, he's most every day in Wolfville confabbin' with Rucker. Not that they nourishes designs; Rucker, mental, bein' no more'n a four spot, an' totally onfit for what the actor person in the Bird Cage Op'ry House calls, 'treasons, strategems an' spoils.' But the Copper Head is so much like Misery, that he shore loves company; an', since no one except Rucker'll stand for his s'ciety, he puts in a lot of time hibernatin' round with that broken-sperited husband. As for Rucker himse'f, he's plumb willin'; for, at bein' what you-all might call a social fav'rite, said spouse of Missis Rucker's ain't got nothin' on the Copper Head. Which any contest of onpopyoolar'ty between 'em would have been a stand-off, a plain case of hoss an' hoss.

"Some darkened sport says some'ers that thar's nothin' in mere looks, in which utterances he's shootin' plenty wild. The Copper Head is instanter the least trusted an' most deespised party that ever comes rackin'

into Wolfville; an' yet, if you backtracks for reasons, you finds nothin' ag'in him at the go-off but his looks.

"For that matter, thar's nothing partic'lar ag'in him at the finish, his clean-up of Bass Drum for them forty thousand, comin' onder the head of a private play, wharin' the public ain't entitled to a look-in. Mines, like roolette an' draw poker an' farobank, is a deevice to which no gent is licensed to pull his cha'r up, onless he's preepared pers'nal to protect himse'f plumb through. If he gets handed a gold brick, thar's nothing' in the sityooation which entitles him, for purposes of revenge or retrobootion, to ring the body pol'tic in on the play. This yere's Peets' doctrine; an', when it comes to a even balancin' of right an' wrong, that scientist possesses the wisdom of a tree full of owls.

"As I states, it's the looks of this Copper Head which confers on him his low ratin' in the gen'ral esteem. He's a thin, bony, scar-crow form of hoomanity, with little red eyes like a ferret, y'ears of onbecoomin' lib'rality, loose lip, wide onauthorized mouth, the whole capped by a stubble of ha'r the hue of one of them liver-colored bird dogs. His hands, too is long an' knobby, an' has a cold, clammy feel when you takes hold of 'em like the belly of a fish. Rucker allows that back East the Copper Head's a sexton, an' digs graves; which may or may not be the reason a damp, moldy, tomb-like smell invests his physical bein' perpetyooal, an' wrops it round like a atmosphere.

"As a further pop'lar set-back the Copper Head lets on he's a party of exact morals. Never once askin' the

way to the nearest s'loon, the same bein' the yoosual inquiry of emigrants, his first question after he hits the outfit is 'Do we-all have a church?' It's on Texas Thompson he presses his query concernin' meetin' houses, an' when Texas replies some surly; 'No, but we've got a grave yard,' meanin' Boot Hill, the Copper Head lapses into silence, savin' what's left of his stock of inquisitiveness for the y'ears of Rucker.

"Aside from him bein' reepulsive, pers'nal, the Copper Head conducts himse'f in a sneaky, onderground way; an' he shows himse'f so he'pless intellectchooal, when put up ag'inst what few prop'sitions the camp casyooally submits to him to fix his caliber, that Boggs an' Tutt an' Texas is all of one mind that he's a eediot.

"'Not witless enough to lock up, you onderstand, explains Tutt, 'but onfit to hold commoonyon with folks whose sombreros is of normal size.'

"'Don't get your chips down wrong, Dave,' warns Peets, to whom Tutt's talkin'; 'that Copper Head's not your kind, an' you simply fails to savey him. You an' Dan an' Texas thar is one an' all the dog sort of man. This Copper Head belongs to the snake tribe. Which you couldn't count him up nor take his measure in a thousand years! You can gamble that name of "Copper Head," which Old Monte informs me he acquires in Tucson, aint no mis-cue in nomenclatchoor!'

"'The Copper Head is loafin' about, listless an' onregyarded, the same evenin' Bass Drum Bowlby blows in. This latter gent is the preecise opposite to the Copper Head, bein' so big an' broad an' thick he has to be prized

out o' the stage, him measurin' wider than the door. Also he's certainly the most resoundin' sport! Which his conversation, when he's talkin', goes rollin' 'round the town like peals of thunder; an' at supper, when he's obleeged to ask for doughnuts the second time, seven ponies boils out of the corral, an' goes stampedin' off for the hills.

"'Say, pard,' he roars appealin'ly to Boggs, who settin' next, "jest please pass them fried holes!'

"An' with that, them alarmed cayouses lines out for cover in the Tres Hermanas, onder the impression Wolfville's done gone crashin' to its eternal fall.

"While I wont say we-all sets up nights declarin' our friendly admiration for Bass Drum none, still he's a mighty sight more tol'rable than the Copper Head. You-all could pass a hour in his company without feelin' the hom'cidal instinct beginnin' to move in your bosom, an' set you eetchin' to shed hooman life. For one moll'fyin' matter, without bein' partic'larly inclined crim-'nal, Bass Drum possesses vices s'fficient to keep a se'f respectin' gent in countenance. He's a heap noisy an' obvious, an' owns a metallic voice like one of these yere Chinese dinner gongs; but he's sociable, an', when all's in, his voice is jest the same a good-nachered voice. Moreover, he's liable to change in a hundred dollar bill at faro-bank, or fling a ten across the Red Light counter as his subscription towards drinks for the house, in which amiable respects he proves himse'f in symp'thy with his day an' place. Also, as I observes, Bass Drum is 'ppre-ciative of the virchoos of vice.

"Shore! The whitest gents I ever meets up with has vices. For myse'f, so long as they keeps 'em out from onder my feet, I finds no fault. What is it Cain remarks after he bumps off Abel that time? While I don't applaud Cain none in that killin', the sentiment he fulm'nates later secoores my yoonan'mous endorsements.

"No gent ought to over-look the great social trooism that, rightly regyarded, a vice is nothin' but a virchoo multiplied. A virchoo is like a cowcumber; it's no good once it goes to seed. Which it then becomes a vice. That's the straight goods; every vice is nothin' but some virchoo over-played. Wharfore, when I crosses up with a gent who's beset of vices that-a-way, I reflects to myself thus-wise: 'Now this yere sport has virchoos; the loose screw is he's got too plumb many an' too much!' Lookin' at it from that angle, he's not only to be excoosed but loved.

"Whoever is this Bass Drum sport? All I knows is that on a first occasion of his showin' up, he rolls into the Red Light, lurches fat an' heavy up ag'in the counter, an' shouts:

"'My name's Bass Drum Bowlby, an' I invites every gent to take a drink. Them who don't drink is welcome to a dollar out of the drawer.'

"Followin' the libation, Bass Drum goin' more into details, makes himse'f heard ag'in. 'For two years,' says he, 'I've been pirootin' 'round between the Rio Colorado an' the Spanish Peaks. Which I'm shore wedded to the West! Likewise, the reason I loves the West is it's a fraud. That's whatever; thar ain't a play

comes off on the sundown side of the Missouri which you-all can p'int to as bein' on the level! Thar ain't a fact or a concloosion on the genyooinness of which you could wager a white chip.'

"'Be you plumb certain?' asks Jack Moore. 'Now it's my belief that every gent in the room has got a cartridge belt full of indespootable facts; an', if a Colt's-45 aint a concloosion, I shore don't know what is.'

"'For heaven's sake!' exclaims Bass Drum, evincin' concern, 'don't talk gun talk. My only thought is to pay the West some compliments. I only says the West's a fraud that a-way as offerin' encomiyums. Which I am somewhat of a fraud myse'f; an' I onhesitatin'ly informs mankind that, at my fact'ry back East, I ain't doin' a thing in a lowly way but makin' goose-ha'r mattrasses out o' wood pulp—not only makin' 'em gents, but sellin' 'em. Two years ago though, as I informs you-all prior, I gets wedded to the West, an' never does go back East no more. I simply stays yere, an' permits that fraudyoolent wood-pulp, goose-ha'r mattrass fact'ry to run itse'f.'

"'He talks,' growls Texas to Boggs, 'of bein' wedded to the West: an' then evolves a howl that the West's a fraud. Which he better try some reg'lar lady once!'

"'May I ask,' puts in Enright, addressin' Bass Drum plenty suave an' bland, 'whatever brings about them nuptials?'

"'It's in Vegas,' says Bass Drum; 'I'm jest in from the East, an' headed for the Vegas Hot Springs. I piles out of the kyars; a party, name unknown, throws me

into a hack. "Plaza Hotel," says I. Ten minutes later we're at that car'vansary. "How much?" says I. "Twenty plunks," says he. "Shake!" says I, as I pays over the twenty bones. "This is where I stay. A country in which you can make twenty dollars in ten minutes is good enough for me!" An' so I goes romancin' along in an' registers, meanwhile singin' "This yere's the place I long have sought, an' mourned because I found it not." Gents, I've been part of the West ever since.'

"'An' prosperin' I reckons?' says Peets.

"'Not exactly prosperin',' returns Bass Drum, startin' the nosepaint on a second trip; 'not altogether prosperin'; but learnin' a whole lot. Bein' the other day in Silver City, I hears of this camp; an' the more I hears the better it sounds. At last I allows I'll break in, look you-all stingin' lizards over, an' mebby make investments.'

"'Investments?' remarks Enright; 'in cattle, do you say?'

"'Not cattle,' returns Bass Drum, wipin' his lips; 'which I gets fully through with cattle over back of San Marcial towards the Black Range. You knows old Axtell of the Triangle X? Bought a thousand head of that old outlaw, thirty dollars per. He builds a chute, drives up the thousand cows, runs 'em through, claps the redhot iron on 'em, counter-brands 'em "C-in-a-box" the new mark I invents. Thar they be gents, back on the range ag'in;—a thousand head of C-in-a-box cows, an' that cimarron Axtell countin' my little old thirty thousand simoleons! Do I come forth onscathed? Gents,

listen! In two months I ain't got twenty head. That C-in-a-box brand ain't nothin' but a ha'r brand; it all grows out afresh, an' them cattle returns *poco tiempo* to their old-time Triangle X form. Oh! you bet I'm learnin'! No more bovines for Bass Drum! This time I aims to break my guileless teeth on mines. If thar's any sport within hearin' of my loud bazoo, who's got a salted mine, let him prepare for the feast. Yere I stands in my ignorance, his nacheral born prey!'

"Sayin' which, Bass Drum beats his breast ontil it booms, while his eyebrows work up an' down like one of them gorillas."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SALTING OF THE GOLDEN RULE

IT looks as though Bass Drum paves the way for his own deestruction. The Copper Head, drawn by the exyooberant an' far-reachin' tones of Bass Drum's, is hoverin' about the portals of the Red Light at the time. He don't come inside none, Cherokee bein' back of his lay-out an' the Copper Head ownin' a mem'ry. Presently he disappears; an', while his comin' and goin' don't leave no profound impressions on me at the moment, I thinks of it afterwards a whole lot.

"Bass Drum pervades the camp in an' out for sev'ral days, an' so far as I hears gets proper action for what *dinero* he puts in cirkyoolation. One evenin', when we're wrastlin' our chuck at the O. K. House—Rucker attendin' on our wants as waiter—Texas asks over his shoulder:

"'Whar's that Copper Head *compadre* of yours, Rucker? I ain't seen him round none for four days?'

"'Well,' snarls Rucker, who's testy an' spiteful on account of him being redooced to a servile p'sition, 'you don't reckon I kills an' eats him, does you?'

"'Don't wax gala, Rucker,' returns Texas, mighty high an' cautionary, 'or the next time Doc Peets wants a skeleton to play hoss with scientific, I'll shore preesent him yours. You-all would furnish a fairly person'ble

skeleton that a-way; what ever do you yourse'f think, Doc?'

"'He'll do,' says Peets, runnin' Rucker over kind o' critical, like he's a hoss an' him, Peets, is goin' to buy him. 'To be shore, Rucker wouldn't afford no skeleton of highest grade, not one of these yere top-notch corn-fed skeletons; but he'd match in plumb successful between a Mexican an' a Digger Injun, as completin' a chain.'

"'You-all asks about the Copper Head?' says Rucker to Texas, a heap subdooed; for the way Texas an' Peets goes bulgin' off about skeletons almost brings on him a fit of the treemors. 'Which he's gone to minin' over in Colorow Gulch. Thar's that prospect Chicken Bill abandons; the Copper Head re-files on it as the "Golden Roole," an' is deevelopin' the same.'

"'Whoever is this yere enterprisin' Copper Head?' asks Bass Drum of Cherokee.

"'Which he's a bad-mannered miscreent,' returns Cherokee, 'who if asked to set into a game of freeze-out for two dollars worth of brains a corner, couldn't even meet the ante.'

"'The more weak-witted,' says Bass Drum, 'the better; less brains, more luck. It takes a eediot to find a mine. Which I'll look this bullhead up some; if he's struck anything good I'll take it away from him.' Then, to Rucker, who's staggerin' in from the kitchen with a passel of dry-apple pies: 'How about this yere Golden Roole mine? What for a prospect is it?'

"'All I knows,' returns Rucker, 'is that the Copper Head sends what he calls a "mill run" over to Silver City

for a assay, an' it shows eight hundred dollars to the ton.'

"'Whoever says sech things as that,' retorts Bass Drum, 'is conversin' through his sombrero. Thar ain't no sech ore in Arizona.'

"While I don't savey mines none, I'm plenty sapient when it comes to men, an' I sees, for all his bluff front, Bass Drum is a heap struck. The next mornin' he hires Rucker of Missis Rucker, to show him where the Golden Roole is located. It's over to'ards Red Dog in Colorow Gulch, an' Rucker an' Bass Drum finds the Copper Head idlin' about in the drift. He an' his Golden Roole mine is a heap alone that a-way, an' never another prospect within a half dozen miles.

"As Bass Drum an' Rucker draws near, they hears the Copper Head singin' a church toone, that one about 'India's Golden Sands.'

"'Is this onder-done party religious?' whispers Bass Drum.

"'Religious?' says Rucker. 'Which I only wishes I has four bits for every pray'r he's flung off! I should say he is religious! Thar's members of the clergy who ain't ace-high to the Copper Head. But see yere,' continues Rucker, detainin' Bass Drum by the arm, 'don't you go sayin' nothin' about that assay. Mebby he ain't ready to have it brooited abroad as yet.'

"'Fear not!' returns Bass Drum; 'my little game don't inclood me tellin' him things.'

"Right yere, the onconscious Copper Head pours out his soul afresh:

"'From Greenland's icy mountains,
To India's golden sands;
Where Africk's sunny fountains
Rolls down them coral strands.'

"'Which he's singin' all wrong!' whispers Bass Drum, disgusted; 'that of itse'f shows his mem'ry to be wabbly in its knees. Which if he can't think any better'n he can sing, he'll be plumb easy! Religious, too, you says? The shore mark of weakness! Look at me!' Yere Bass Drum lapses into his pastime of thumpin' his bosom. 'Look at me an' wonder!—six feet tall, an' a chest like a hoss! This Copper Head, bein' off his feet religious, shows he's of a flimsy, clingin' vine-like nacher, an' no more backbone to him than a wet lariat. A robust sport like me, who knows his way through, plays tag with sech a weaklin'.'

"Bass Drum an' Rucker deecends on the Copper Head, an' the Bass Drum says: 'How thar, pard!'

"The Copper Head gives a nervous start, an' looks 'round with his red ferretty eyes.

"'How!' says the Copper Head. Then, beholdin' Rucker:—'Whatever be you-all doin',' he asks, 'so far from your dooties? You ain't had time none'—glancing at the sun—'to get your noon-day dishes washed.'

"Rucker at these slights grows some heated, but says nothin', fearful what bluffs he makes gets back to Misses Rucker. Bass Drum, however, relieves him by takin' up the talk.

"'Struck somethin' rich?' he asks. 'Which if it's good I'll buy it.'

"'Friend,' returns the Copper Head, honest an'

deprecatory, an' runnin' his oncertain fingers through his bird-dog ha'r, 'this yere's but a barren prospect, I fears; I'm none convinced of its valyoo. It's not for me to deloode the onwary, an' I shall avoid offers ontil I be. That's why I names it the Golden Roole.'

"Thar's a queer greenish-yellow look to the gray face of the rock, an' a sharp smell in the air that tickles the nostrils like hartshorn. Bass Drum wrinkles up his nose sympathetic, an' wipes the water from his eyes; to which man'festations the Copper Head responds like they're queries.

"'What you-all smells,' says he, 'is a prep'ration for softenin' the rock. It's somethin' like embalmin' flooid; I gets onto it when I'm in the ondertaking line. It's what gives the rock that green-yellow tinge. She shore does soften it up a whole lot, however; the drillin' and diggin' is redooced by half.'

"As the Copper Head gets off this yere explanation, he oncovers a big glass bottle, holdin' about a gallon, where it's lyin' hid beneath his coat. Thar's a rubber stopper. The Copper Head picks up the bottle, an' handles it as if it's filled with centipedes an' each clamorous for p'isenous action. Both Bass Drum an' Rucker notice how it's half full of a liquid of a greenish-yellow color, to match the pecooliar hue of the rock face.

"'It's a heap vol'tile,' observes the Copper Head, 'an' I has to keep it tight corked. I spills out what I uses as I goes along.'

"Sayin' which, the Copper Head slops out about a pint into a glazed earthern dish, with the heedfulness

of b'ilin' oil. Then he sops it up with a bresh, an' paints away at the rock face same as though he's white-washin' a fence.

"'An does that soften the rock?' asks Bass Drum, sort o' held by the exhibition.

"'Leaves it like so much cheese!' returns the Copper Head, white-washin' away mighty sedyoolous.

"'What's that embalmin' mixchoor composed of?' asks Bass Drum ag'in, at the same time rubbin' his nose an' eyes, the fumes growin' doubly acrid while the Copper Head works.

"'What's it composed of?' repeats the Copper Head. Then he shets one eye, an' grins both feeble an' deerisive. If it ain't for his liver-colored ha'r, you might think he's a sheep trying to assoome a foxy look. 'Excoose me!' he says, 'that's my little hold-out.'

"Bass Drum don't press the business of the embalmin' flooid, but la'nches out into what he calls a 'train of argyooment,' calk'lated to make cl'ar how he ain't got time to wait the slow onfoldment of the Golden Roole. The best he can say is he's jest now squanderin' round on a hunt for a mine, an', if the Copper Head'll furnish him what spec'mens he wants, he'll have a assay made an' mebby buy.

"The Copper Head listens, his lank jaw ajar as if he ain't got force of char'cter s'fficient to shet his mouth. Bass Drum talks on, all sperit an' bustle an' business, while the dazed Copper Head hangs back in the breechin', like a dull mule at a quicksand crossin'.

"'I ain't ready none to deal,' the Copper Head protests

final. 'Sellin' a pig in a poke is as bad a buyin' a pig in a poke. Yere I be, plumb ignorant whether I have somethin' or nothin'; an' you-all comes bushwackin' 'round an' talks of buyin' me out.'

"'Not before a assay, onderstand,' returns Bass Drum. 'Most likely this yere rock ain't got no more gold into it than grindstones.'

"'Well, I shore don't know!' returns Copper Head, crackin' the j'ints of his knobby fingers ontil they sounds like cockin' a Winchester. 'Whatever is your advice, Mister Rucker?'

"Bass Drum winks his nigh eye at Rucker as sayin' thar's somethin' in it for him, an' Rucker tharupon yoonites his voice to Bass Drum's.

"'What harm,' he says, 'to let him get a assay?'

"With both of 'em ag'inst him, the reluctant Copper Head at lasts consents. A blast is put in, an' fifty pounds of spec'mens knocked off the rock face.

"Bass Drum prodooces a dozen buckskin pouches from the warbags on his pony.

"'You observes,' he remarks to the Copper Head, 'I travels preepared.'

"Bass Drum fills the buckskin pouches, ties 'em up tight, an' swings 'em half an' half across the horn of his saddle, the Copper Head eyein' proceedin's with a doobious air.

"'I reckon it's all right,' he remarks, like he's tryin' to convince himse'f. 'I lets a couple of mav'ricks from Tucson have a hatful yesterday, an' tharfore why not you?'

"Bass Drum pricks up his y'ears, smellin' rivals. 'Which I'll start these bags,' he says, 'for Silver City this evenin'. Meanwhile, stand them Tucson hold-ups off. If they're the sharps I thinks they be, they'll do you out o' your eye teeth. Give 'em so much as a toe-hold anywhere, an' they'll steal everything but the back fence.'

"That evenin', about sixth drink time, Bass Drum grows confidential with Peets.

"'It's like playin' seven-up with a babe onweaned,' he says. 'Still, it ain't as if this Copper Head is otherwise safe. Which I don't mind confessin', I'd shore hesitate to lay him waste, only if I don't rob him some more hardened party will.'

"'Don't his bein' religious,' asks Peets, 'sort o' op'rate to stay your devastatin' hand? Or be your wars of commerce waged equal ag'inst both believer and onbeliever?'

"'At the game of dollar-chasin',' responds Bass Drum, mighty cocky, 'believers or onbelievers, Jews or Gentiles, it's all one to me. Whenever I gets ready to throw a stone, you bet I ain't carin' wheether it hits a grog shop or a church.'

"'To be shore,' observes Tutt, when later he's discussin' matters with Peets an' Texas, 'I ain't no use for that Copper Head; an' yet I asks myse'f be we jestified in permittin' this over-powerin' Bass Drum to strip that feebliest of his all?'

"'Dave,' returns Peets, 'I regyards your excitement as misplaced. If you has tears to shed, reeserve 'em for that vain-glorious Bass Drum.'

"Three days, an' Bass Drum gets the returns from Silver City. The fifty pounds of ore shows forty dollars —sixteen hundred dollars to the ton! Bass Drum's ha'r assooms the perpendic'lar, he's that scared lest them Tucson coyotes gets a prior move on, an' beats him to it.

"As fast as pony can drum the ground, Bass Drum goes surgin' over to Red Dog. The Copper Head hesitates an' hangs back; he wants to hear from them Tucson parties, he says, who gets the hatful of spec'mens. Bass Drum won't hear to it, but crowds the Copper Head's irresoloote hand, namin' two thousand dollars.

"'An' at that,' observes Bass Drum when, a month later, he's roofully recountin' his financial wounds to Peets an' Enright that a-way, 'if I has a lick of sense, I ought to have remembered that, with the eight hundred dollar assay Rucker speaks of former, this Copper Head must shore possess some half-way notion of where he's at. But no; thar I go cavortin' to deestruction like a bar'l down hill! Congratchoolatin' myse'f, too, on my sooperhooman cunnin', when I evades his queries as to how that last assay turns out! Gents, I knows burros of inferior standin', who in intellects could give me kyards an' spades!'

"When Bass Drum says two thousand, the Copper Head falls into a brown study. The longer he studies, the sadder an' more sorrowful he gets.

"'It's all wrong!' he says at last. 'I'll never yereafter see the hour when the gnawin' tooth of conscience'll be still!' An' yet, if I must sin, let it not be for no

bagatelles, which I'll shore refoose to sell my soul for a paltry two thousand. Say forty thousand, an' doubtless the temptation'll be more than I can b'ar.'

"Bass Drum sweats an' froths an' argues, but he's up ag'inst it. The eediotic Copper Head, with the pertinac-'ty of weakminded folks, holds by that forty thousand like it's the rock of his last hope.

"'With forty thousand in my grasp,' says the Copper Head, 'I returns East, re-enters the ondertakin' profession, resoomes my rightful place on the front seat of a hearse, an' lifts up my diminished head as of yore. That's the figger, forty thousand; an' not a nickle less!'

"Thar's nothin' else to do; Bass Drum yields, an' him an' the Copper Head goes over to Tucson, where he endows that red-ha'red reptile with eight five-thousand dollar bills. Inside of no time, the Copper Head is a thing of the Tucson-Wolfville past.

"It takes a fortnight for Bass Drum to convince himse'f thar ain't as much treasure to be extracted from the Golden Roole, as should belong in the bank-roll behind a ten cent game of Mexican monte. For a moment he's hotter'n a fire in a lard fact'ry. Then he simmers down.

"'Gents,' says he, 'I'm stuck! That Golden Roole's a deadfall! Between old Axtell an' his ha'r brands, an' this yere Copper Head an' his salted mines, it'll take a forest of sprooce, worked up into goose-ha'r mattrasses, to reestore my fallen fortunes.'

"Salt a mine!' exclaims Enright. 'That egree-

gious Copper Head don't look like he's equal to saltin' sheep! I shore marvels how he does it!'

"Pete Bland, the Red Dog boniface at whose flapjack foundry the Copper Head's been hangin' out, brings over a gallon bottle with a rubber stopper to Peets. He finds it, he says, in the Copper Head's former room. It's filled with the same greenish-yellow liquid, wharwith the Copper Head is doctorin' the Golden Roole, when Bass Drum an' Rucker surprises him at his labors. The question is, can Peets as a scientific sharp identify the same?

"Peets oncorks the bottle, takes a sniff, an' bats a tearful eye:—

"'Chlorine!' says he.

"Then he pours about a pint into a wide glass dish. In half an hour or less, it's took to itse'f wings an' evaporated.

"Thar's enough sediment remainin' to fill two tablespoons. Peets puts it into a bowl, an' fills the bowl up with water. Then he twists an' tosses an' whirls an' slops away at it, same as if he's pannin' out gold. That's what it comes to; he cleans up enough dust to make a ten-dollar gold piece.

"Bass Drum has already posted Peets how the Copper Head white-washes away at the rock face, an' Peets gets a bresh and tries a quart of the embalmin' flooid on a round hard rock, the size of a water melon, which is lyin' in front of the New York Store. The results is highly gratifyin'; the stone sucks up that embalmin' flooid like it's a sponge, thirstily gettin' away with the entire

quart. Also it turns that same good old greenish-yellow color.

"When the stone has done drunk up its quart, Peets regyards it plenty thoughtful.

"'By what that pint pans out,' he says, 'thar should be twenty dollars worth of gold in this yere dornick!'

"Which the subsequent assay proves said surmise to be c'rrect.

"Thar's mebby a pint remainin' of the embalmin' flooid, an' Peets cuts loose chem'cal, an' subjects it to exper'ments.

"'An' at that, Sam,' says Peets to Enright at the wind-up, 'I can't say what it wholly is! Thar's this, however: It contains, among other things, chloric acid with king's water, which last is a comb'nation of sulphooric an' nitric acids. The proportion of ox'gyn, thus secoored, is so tremenjus it makes no more of eatin' up forty dollars worth of gold to the gallon, than a colored camp meetin' would of eatin' up forty yellow-laigged chickens. Also, it's so penetratin' it'll carry the gold through eighteen inches of solid rock. Gents, we've been entertainin' a angel onawares. That Copper Head person is a genius; he has raised mine-saltin' to the plane of art.'

"It's two years before we ag'in hears of the Copper Head. A waif-word wanders up from Rincon that some deservin' party opens on him, low and satisfact'ry, with a ten guage Greener shot gun, twenty-one buckshot to the shell, an' bombards him into the heavenly land of many mansions, where the come-ons cease from troublin' an' the mine-salter is at rest. The vig'lance commit-

tee, which considers the case, sustains the action of Cherokee that time in eejectin' the Copper Head from the Red Light; since it exculpates the accoosed shot-gun gent, on the grounds that the Copper Head is lookin' at his wife."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE WISDOM OF DOC PEETS

"MOST likely," observed the old gentleman, spearing at me with his pipe-stem to invoke attention, "you never is aware of it none, but the thing that wearies the West as a region plumb to death, is the onlicensed air of patronage an' high conceit adopted towards it by the East. Which it's this yere, ondoubted, that eggs us on, when we plays it so low down on Professor De Puff it sends that phreenol'gist, scamperin' an' skallyhootin' into Tucson all spraddled out, eyes protroodin' like the horns on a yearlin' bull—which you could knock 'em off with a club—to go pantin' forth a white-faced tale of how Wolfville's done been abolished in consoomin' flames an' smoke.

"For myse'f, I always attribyootes this yere Eastern conceit to ignorance that a-way, a attitood wharin I'm sustained by Doc Peets.

"'The yawnin' peril to this nation,' says Peets, as we're loiterin' over our drinks one Red Light evenin', 'is the ignorance of the East. Thar's folks back thar, speshully in Noo York, who with their oninstructed backs to the settin' sun, don't even know thar is a West. Likewise, they're proud as peacocks of their want of knowledge. They'd feel plenty ashamed to be caught knowin'

anything on the Rocky Mountain side of the Hudson River.'

"Is Peets deep? Son, you astounds me! Solomon could have made the killin' of his c'rreer by simply goin' to school to Peets. That scientist is equal to everything except the imposs'ble. An' when it comes to philosophic deeductions that a-way, you're jestified in spreadin' your big bets on whatever Peets hands out.

"As sheddin' a ray, let me step one side of the direct trail of this yere narrative to tell you what Peets does. He actchooally reyoonites Tucson Jennie an' Soap Suds Sal in bonds of amity, the time they falls out an' gets their mootual horns locked—walks right up to them contendin' ladies, Peets does, an' reasons with 'em, at a moment too when the gamest gent in camp don't dare go near enough to one of 'em to hand her a diamond ring!

"It's this a-way: Soap Suds Sal, as I relates, weds Riley Brooks. Bein' thus moved up into p'sition as a married lady affects Sal; she feels the change, an' takes to puttin' on dog immod'rate. This yere haughtiness provokes Tucson Jennie, who's a wife of sev'ral years standin', an' nacherally she goes to the floor with Sal. Of course, you onderstands I means verbal—thar's nothin' so onladylike as physical voylence.

"Peets happens to be across in Red Dog, but Enright dispatches Boggs to tell him to come a-runnin'. He looks a trifle doobious, I admits, when he hears.

"'Does either of 'em call the other "ugly" Nell?' he asks some anxious of Faro Nell, who's been hoverin' over the fracas throughout.

"'Oh no,' says Nell; 'they don't say nothin' about looks.'

"'Or "old"?' goes on Peets.

"'No,' returns Nell, 'they ain't got to ages none as yet, but Sal's workin' herse'f up to it.'

"Peets heaves a sigh of relief. 'It's all right, gents,' he says, sort o' cl'arin' up; 'I thinks I sees my way through to bring 'em together ag'in in peace an' love.'

"Which Peets does; Missis Rucker an' Faro Nell backin' the play with handkerchiefs, to pass Sal an' Tucson Jennie when they bursts into tears.

"'Whatever's the matter of the East, Doc?' asks Boggs that evenin' in the Red Light. 'Why should it turn its fool back on us?'

"'The cause, Dan,' says Peets, 'lies deep in the heart of things. The big trouble with the East is it's not only ignorant, like I says, but ignorant in a pin-head way of se'f importance. It'll prance forth an' look the West over, towerist fashion, through the distortin' medium of a Pullman kyar window, an' go back bent double onder the idee it's got the Western picture from foretop to fetlock. Also, it never seems to enter its egreegeous head none that, while it's been lookin' the West over, it's been a heap looked over by the West. The East, mental, is onequal to graspin' the great trooth that once you've come clost enough to see a party, you've come clost enough to be seen, an' that about the time you gets onto some deefect in another gent, he's spotted a imperfection or two in you.'

"'All of which,' interjects Boggs, mighty satisfied, 'is plumb loocid an' convincin'.'

"'The East runs all the resk in this,' goes on Peets, measurin' out his little old forty drops. 'Nacher demands a equilibrium. To be ignorant, that a-way, is to be in danger; to let folks know more about you than you knows about them, is a step towards bein' enslaved. Shore; people ain't sent to jail half so much for what they do as for what they don't know. To keep yourse'f plenty posted is the price of liberty.'

"'That's whatever!' coincides Boggs, who's as faithful to all Peets says as a younger brother.

"'Moreover, Dan,' concloodes Peets, 'never make the Eastern mistake of imaginin' you've got the only kodak on the lawn. While the East is snappin' the West, the West is capturin' the East for onlimited plates, the merest glimpses of which would send that besotted corner of the yooniverse tumblin' from its perch. Likewise, it would tharafter roost a mighty sight nearer the ground.'

"This yere Professor De Puff is a case in Eastern p'int. Enright an' Peets is both away from camp when he drifts in; Peets has gone romancin' over to Prescott, while Enright's trackin' 'round up to'ards Albuquerqui about a cattle deal. Which the commoonal scarc'ty of them gents is jest as well; mighty likely, if present, they deeplores the way we wrings amoosement from that phreenol'gist, an' wet-blankets the play.

"It's at supper in the O. K. Restauraw that the Professor begins to reap the benefit of our s'ciety. We-all scouts him up an' down out of the corners of our eyes, an'

I must say his looks is ag'in him. He's got a head like a melon, an' tilts his soopercilious nose as though he smells a orchard. Also, his expression's as sour an' sodden an' cold as a clay farm in the month of March. It's cl'ar, too, he regyards us as mere four-laigged beasts of the field, whose meeger stock of information is confined to the knowledge that we're alive.

"While Rucker is slammin' viands onto the table—Missis Rucker redooces Rucker to the ignoble status of a waiter, after she recovers him back from the Apaches that time—the Professor's glance goes rovin', some lofty, from one to the other of us, his manner bespeakin' disdain. Final, he sort o' culm'nates on Old Monte, who's down by the end of the table with Boggs.

"'You're married?' says he, by way of breakin' ground for a talk, p'intin' meanwhile at Old Monte with a three-tine fork.

"'Married?' returns Old Monte, gettin' sort o' sore.

"'That's the substance of my remark,' observes the Professor.

"'Well, you go bet the limit, sport,' says Old Monte, harpoonin' a slice of ham plenty dexterous, 'that any story you hears about me bein' married is exaggerated.'

"Thar's no tellin' what the Professor is aimin' at in them observations, Texas Thompson breakin' in with a interruption. Texas is camped next to the Professor. Also the milk, that Missis Rucker is lavishin' on us, is of the condensed vari'ty. Which strange as it may break on tenderfoot y'ears, the three sparse things in a cow country is butter, beef an' milk—that is, shore-

enough milk. Of this yere stringy, condensed, patent-office kind, thar's plenty an' to spar'.

"In the present instance, from the suspicious way the Professor dallies with that invention, it's plain he's never before been put up ag'inst condensed milk. Thar's a band of burros, with bed-slat ribs an' all mighty onkempt, vis'ble out of the open window, the same belongin' to a Greaser who's brought Missis Rucker a lay-out of mesquite roots for her stove. Texas takes advantage of this. He tastes the milk kind o' resentful, an' then p'intedly surveys the band of burros. At last, like his mind's made up, he leans across to Cherokee, an' says some fierce:

"'The management of this yere hash j'int is either goin' to feed them burros more nootritious food, or I'll shore inaug'rate a S'ciety for the Preevention of Crooelty to Boarders. This yere milk is onfit for hooman consumption; it tastes prickly, like it's full of cactus thorns.'

"'Oh I don't know,' responds Cherokee, in his p'lite way. 'Which this milk seems good to me. Anyhow, you can't tell nothin' by them burros' exterior.'

"Texas keeps on tastin' an' grumblin', an' allowin' thar's somethin' off-color about that milk.

"'Does it hit you right, pard?' he asks at last, comin' round on the Professor; 'you bein' direct from the East, your palate's not so benumbed an' coarse as ours.'

"While Texas is sizin' up them burros, an' carryin' on so plumb bilious about the milk, the Professor's eyes is beginin' to roll oneasy; he's gettin' pale as a candle, an' shows faded about the corners of his mouth.

"As Texas tenders the condensed milk, he starts back as horrified as if it's a trant'ler.

"'Me?' he exclaims givin' a shudderin' glance at the frowsy, bed-slat burros. 'I never assim'lates so much as a drop of that lacteel flooid!' Then he sighs an' shudders some more, all plenty reepugnant, an' says doleful: 'This is a wretched reepast!'

"'Wretched!' yells Boggs, from down at the end; 'wretched! What miscreent allows this yere reepast is wretched? As a day-in-an'-day-out guest at this car'vansary, I demands he be p'inted out.'

"'No offence is designed, sir,' says the Professor some shook, Boggs bein' that big an' vehement; 'an' I appeals to you, as a onbiased gent, if I'm jestified in all honesty in namin' this a best reepast.'

"'Well,' replies Boggs, lettin' on he's strugglin' to hold himse'f down, 'I don't want to crowd no sport in deefiance of his conscience. Let me put a question; meanwhile, warnin' you-all that in so doin' I'm taxin' my sens'bilities to the utmost. Assoomin' as you says' —yere Boggs leans his elbows on the table, an' gazes at the Professor plumb sinister—'that the bounties now freightin' this yere board comprises a wretched reepast, I asks in all forbearance be you willin' to confess it's still the *best* wretched reepast you ever tackles?'

"'Yes,' replies the Professor after a pause, an' speakin' slow an' worried; 'I thinks I may adopt your verbiage, an' deescribe it as the best wretched reepast of which I recollects.'

"Boggs he'ps himse'f to some can tomatters like he's

satisfied, while the Professor softly shoves his cha'r back an' withdraws. Later, I sees him t'arin' into smoked herrin's an' crackers in the New York Store.

"It's Missis Rucker who onfolds to us how the Professor's goin' to give a lecture on phreenol'gy.

"'He's monstrous sagacious, that a-way,' says Missis Rucker, 'an' can lay b'ar any individyooal's past, present or footure by simply feelin' his bumps a whole lot. I believes it, too, for I recalls hearin' Doc Peets say thar's a heap in phreenol'gy. I reckons I'll have him thumb Rucker's head some. My husband's always been a puzzle to me, an' yere's a chance to solve the myst'ry of him.'

"'Then we may expect you at the exercises this evenin'?' remarks Boggs, lookin' disapp'inted.

"'No,' says Missis Rucker, 'I regrets I can't come none. Little Enright Peets has done been took with the measles, an' Jen invites me an' Nell yere to come over after supper, for comfort an' consultations. I'll ask Dave Tutt to take Rucker, an' ride herd on him while the Professor makes a round-up of his bumps. He'll write out what he finds on a chart, so yereafter I has it ever handy when Rucker deevelopes a new kink.'"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LECTURE IN THE LADY GAY

THIS all happens way back in the earlier hours of the camp, when Wolfville's in its swaddlin' clothes. The Professor, spyin' about for a hall, pitches on what's left of the old Lady Gay S'loon. Which said structchoor is that edifice of barn-boards an' sixteen-ounce tent-cloth our long-ago Colonel slams up, when he opens shop alongside Hamilton's dance hall, an' meanly seeks to maverick the latter gent's toones, an' pull off fandangoes to the stolen strains of his fiddles. As you remembers, that pestif'rous Colonel economist don't last; an', when the Professor shows up, thar's his empty sheebang preecisely like he leaves it. Bein' a money-savin' soul, an' seein' he gets the Lady Gay for nothin', the Professor announces he'll lecture—what he calls 'Give a Readin''—tharin. The excitement is schedyooled for second drink time in the evenin'.

"By behests of Missis Rucker, delivered before her an' Faro Nell lines out to see about them measles little Enright Peets is sufferin' with, Rucker packs in a table an' all the cha'rs from the O. K. House, by way of fittin' up the Lady Gay for the Professor. The table's up front, with a karosene lamp an' a skull, the skull constitootin' part of the Professor's reg'lar lay-out. Thar's four

other karosene lamps about the walls which gives plenty of light, an' all a heap sumptuous.

"Jack Moore, who in the absence of Enright an' Peets puts it up he'll preeside by virchoo of his office as kettle tender, takes a seat at the table with the Professor. Bein' seated, he scowls about in a forbiddin' way, an' reequests order to prevail.

"'You murderers set plumb quiet now,' says Jack, layin' his two guns on the table with a deal of clatter, 'or I'll mow you down in red an' smokin' swaths. Meanwhile, let me introdooce to your fav'rable notice one whose name as scientist, savant an' gent, by every fireside between the oceans, is a household word. I need skurcely say I alloodes to the lecturer of the evenin', the cel'brated Professor De Bluff.'

"'Not Bluff,' whispers the Professor mighty piteous; 'Puff.'

"'Shore! I begs pardon,' says Jack; 'Puff of course.' Then to us out in the cha'rs: 'I gets my stack down wrong, gents; allow me to present Professor De Puff. His lecture is to be on "Heads, an' Heads in Gen'ral," the same 'llustrated by a public readin' of the bumps of Mister Rucker.'

"The Professor gazes askance at Jack's guns, an' rises to his feet. 'I was promised,' he says, 'a subject for this evenin's exper'ment—a Mister Rucker. May I ask is thar a Mister Rucker with us?'

"'Yere's your victim,' says Tutt, shovin' Rucker to the front by the scruff of his neck, Rucker twistin' an' turnin' like a mortified bobcat tryin' to get at Tutt.

'Thar's the abandoned wretch!' goes on Tutt, flingin' Rucker into a seat like he's a bag of bran. 'Paw the old profligate over, an' give a waitin' public the results.'

"The Professor puts a good face on it, though he's appalled by Tutt's voylence. He steps to the end of the table where Rucker's been planted, an' is organizin' to begin when Boggs climbs to his feet.

"'Mister Cha'rman,' says Boggs, 'prior to this learned shorthorn soilin' his fingers on the head of that low-down spec'men of the peasantry which Mister Tutt has jest drug up, I'd like him to give me the troo inwardness of a bump of onyoosual magnitoode, which I myse'f possesses.'

"'Speakin' personal,' returns Jack, 'I certainly offers no objections. Which if Professor De Snuff—I asks your forb'arance, I should say Puff—is willin' to waste his time on sech felons as you, he may do so. Only'—yere Jack p'ints his finger at Boggs plenty om'nous—'don't onbelt in any rannikaboo breaks. You knows my offishul motto: "Corpses is models of quietood an' good order."'

"Upon Boggs' approachin' the table, the Professor who's been set breathin' rather quick by Jack's fulm'nations, allows he's plumb willin' to consider Boggs' case. The day before, in comin' over a swell at a hand-gallop, Boggs' pony gets it's laig in a badger hole, an' it an' Boggs goes rollin' down hill all tangled up. In scramblin' to its four hoofs, the pony raps Boggs on the top of the head some emphatic with its knee, an' leaves

a lump the size of a lemon. Which it's this yere excrescence Boggs submits to the Professor.

"'Cut loose,' says Boggs, 'an' give this yere enlightened gatherin' the froots of your manipyoolations.'

"'That's the bump of firmness,' says the Professor, fingerin' away at Boggs' head. 'You're as immov'ble as the everlastin' hills! The deevelopment is wonderful!'

"'Firmness!' says Boggs. 'Immov'ble! Well I should say as much! Gibralter's on wheels to me! Likewise, let me offer congratchoolations, Professor, on your perspicac'ty. That swellin', which you reads like a printed page in one whirl of the wheel, baffles an' sets at naught the best intellecks of two hem'spheres.'

"Boggs grasps the Professor's hand, who yields the same reluctant, an' is preparin' to say more when Cherokee speaks up from the audience.

"'Mister Pres'dent,' he says, 'I shore trusts you'll dismiss, to his proper seat, that drunken boor with the swellin' on his head, an' forbid him to annoy this assemblage no further.'

"Boggs whirls on Cherokee like a insulted grizzly, but before he can make a reply, Jack comes down on him with a cocked Colt's-45.

"'That'll do,' says Jack. 'Another yelp, an' I'll blow your light out! Don't forget that the day so far has proved for me a barren one; I ain't beefed no one none as yet.'

"As Boggs retires in silence to his seat, Jack lays down his weepon ag'in, an' waves his hand towards the Professor.

"'Professor De Guff—I means Puff—will now proceed with the deal,' he says. Then to the Professor: 'Get busy with that old mule-thief's cocoanut before these yere outlaws makes another start. If possible, I'd shore admire to go through the evenin' without bumpin' somebody off.'

"'Mister Cha'rman an' gents,' says the Professor, restin' one hand aff'bly on Rucker's shoulder. 'I wish I could also add "ladies;" but sech is out of the question, since none of the gentler sex is with us this evenin,' havin' been called as ministerin' angels to the pillow of infantile sickness. However, as I was sayin': Mister Pres'dent an' gents, phreenol'gy, of which I may say I'm a loominous exponent, receives its earlier impulse as a science onder the astoote auspices of a philos'pher named Fowler. Perhaps I can best demonstrates the poss'bilities of phreenol'gy by proceedin' without further delays to a examination of the craniyum of Mister Rucker, who's been contreebooted for that purpose by his esteemable wife.'

"Yere the Professor plays over Rucker's head with his fingers, the same as if it's a keyboard of a piano. At last he looks up, confident an' cheerful, an' says:

"'Correct me if I'm wrong, gents. My investigations pronounces this yere craniyum to be that of a congen'tal crim'nal intensified by drink.'

"'Who you callin' a crim'nal?' demands Rucker in hurt tones.

"'Now don't you go to runnin' any blazers!' breaks in Jack, addressin' Rucker an' reachin' for his six-

shooters. 'Who's he callin' a crim'nal? Which he's callin' you a crim'nal; an', considerin' how you steals them mules up by Fort Union, I holds it's a mighty legit'mate epithet.'

"'But I never steals no private mules,' protests pore Rucker. 'Them mules is gov'ment mules; I gets 'em off a ambyoolance—four of 'em.'

"'None the less,' says Jack, 'speakin' technicle it's crim'nal. Professor De Muff's, excoose me, Puff's entirely ackerate in his employment of terms. Roll your game, Professor. Don't mind the subject; he's locoed an' never has no sense no how.'

"Rucker glowers at Jack, but don't say nothin', an' the Professor resoomes his discourse.

"'As I was sayin',' observes the Professor; 'this yere's the head of a born crim'nal intens'fied by drink, an' the words is hardly out of my mouth when they receives flatterin' corrob'ration, an' it's shown how this onmitigated bandit purloins a quartette of mules.'

"'Mister Cha'rman,' breaks in Texas, 'I rises to a question of priv'lege. Which if this yere jacklaig phreenol'gist is goin' to give evidence of any mule larcenies, I demands he be sworn. Low an' onworthy as Rucker is, he all the same has got his rights.'

"'An' I gives notice right yere,' shouts Tutt, leapin' to his feet an' makin' a lunge to get at Texas, the same bein' frustrated by Cherokee who holds him back, 'that I pays my four-bits at the door to hear the lukyoobrations of this bump-sharp; an' I don't propose bein' swindled out of 'em by no noisy an' resoundin' four-flush from

Texas. Cherokee, let me go! Which nothin' but his heart'll do me now!'

"'Set down!—both of you tarrapins!' roars Jack. 'Be you seekin' to coerce me into sheddin' blood? Set down, or I'll fill you both as full of lead as Joplin an' Galena! Which I won't tell you ag'in! Professor De Stuff, or Puff, or Muff, or whatever his brand is, 'll have a fine story to carry East about the manners of this camp! A passel of Digger Injuns is Chesterfields to you prairie dogs!'

"This yere last outburst between Tutt an' Texas so discourages the Professor he allows he reckons he'll pack in.

"'It seems imposs'ble to go on!' he says, 'an' we every moment on the verge of spillin' hooman life. Which we're as ones balanced on the brink of a precipice drippin' gore! Wharfore, I thinks I'll end my lecture before murder ensoos. Shorely, it's better thus.'

"'I thinks not!' returns Jack, grim an' prompt. 'If you-all figgers, Professor, this outfit's that soopine as to let you announce a phreenol'gy lecture, win out four-bits per capitty at the door, ondertake a readin' of Rucker's head, an' then, when you've got the old ruffian half expounded, that a-way, an' our cur'osity keyed to concert pitch, fold up your layout an' pull your freight, your estimates of us is erroneous to the frontiers of the false. Thar's folks gone to the windmill with a lariat round their necks for less!'

"'Onderstand!' hastily exclaims the Professor, agitated plumb through by Jack's long speech, the same

bein' reeled off with amazin' sperit—'onderstand, gents, it all rests with you! If it's the gen'ral voice, I'll be only too proud to proceed.'

"'You're all right, Professor,' speaks up Boggs by way of encouragements. 'Don't let these yere bloviatin' groundlin's buffalo you a little bit. They ain't any of 'em killed more'n ten, nor skelped more'n six. Go on an' toot your horn. Which I'm with you to the death!'

"After a spell, the Professor gets his nerves ca'med down, an' cl'ars his throat for a fresh start. Runnin' his hand over the r'ar of Rucker's head, he remarks: 'Which we come now to philoprogin'tiveness. In that interestin' connection, I can best expound what I desires by tellin' a story. It's back in Topeka in the commonwealth of Kansas, an' I'm examinin' the cranial deevelopments of a Osage Injun, who's been lured to the evenin's readin's by a one dollar bill. I ought to impart to you-alls that, onder the beenign inflooences of a higher edjoocation, I not only onfolds as a phreenol'gist but blossoms, speritchooal, to sech heights I becomes a foremost figger among the age's philanthropists, an' a firm believer in the yooniversal brotherhood of man. By the light of this explanation, you perceives without puttin' me to the blushin' immodesty of statin' the fact in person, that I deetects no difference in races, but treats a Injun exackly the same as if he's a white man.'

"'Hold on!' says Tutt, 'Mister Cha'rman, I cannot let sech sent'ments pass. Lest what the learned sport jest utters has mal-effects on the younger elements of this gatherin', I rises to say that treatin' a Injun as if he's a

white man is like treatin' a coyote as if he's a collie dog. Beautiful as a abstraction, it cannot be applied to a sheep country.'

"'As mod'rator of this meetin',' observes Jack, beatin' on the table with one of his guns same as he's seen Enright, 'if I don't exert the full majesty of my p'sition, to put the kybosh on the gent who's jest broke loose, it's because I agrees heart an' soul with his remarks. Which Injuns is shore p'isen; an' every right-thinkin' husband, brother, son an' father'll employ his leesure in downin' all he can. Havin' deefined myse'f, an' added the mite of my pore endorsements to the test'mony of Mister Tutt, we will now rack along with the play. Professor De Stuff—'

"'Puff, sir, Puff—if you please!' interrupts the Professor in pleadin' tones.

"'Didn't I say "Puff?"' asks Jack. 'I shore intends to. However on with the dance, let joy be onconfined. You was speakin' about that Topeka savage, Professor.'

"'Thar's present on the stage with me,' re-begins the Professor, 'a em'nent Creole from Noo Orleans.'

"'Cree-owl!' repeats Boggs. 'In order that I grasps this harangue in its utmost as we goes sashayin' along, let me inquire if cree-owls is same as squinch owls?'

"'What barb'rous onenlightenment!' exclaims Texas, in onmeasured scorn. 'Man, a creole ain't no fowl, it's a animal. I ketches one alive once, an' is raisin' it as a pet; but I has to kill it, the neighbors claimin' it keeps 'em awake nights with its howls.'

"'Go on!' says Jack, grindin' his teeth an' bendin' a

malignant eye on Boggs an' Texas, 'go on with your pesterin'! I sees it comin'! You'll weary me to where I'll massacre you both, or I'm a Siwash!'

"'Thar's no tellin' where Boggs an' Texas'll wind up, if Rucker don't cut in. Scowlin' up at the Professor, he says:

"'You-all uses language about me to-night I don't take from no one but my wife. Whatever do you mean by denouncin' me as a congen'tal crim'nal?'

"'Softly, friend!' replies the Professor; 'before I'm through, it's my pious purpose to show you how to purify your nacher an' make it white as snow. It's but to prostrate yourse'f at the throne. Hope on! The mercy of heaven is infinite; it forgives the thief on the cross!'

"'Which you're certainly a compl'mentary galoot!' says Rucker in high dudgeon; 'an', so soon as ever I escapes from yere, I'll give you a argyooment you'll despise. No sech limber-jim as you is goin' to go on aspersin' me like this, an' live.'

"'Come, Professor,' urges Jack, 'get this yere homily dealt down to the turn. I've app'inted myse'f to onbend in some slaughterin' when you're finished, an' I lusts to commence.' Then, to the audience: 'Gents, let me labor with you-all for decency an' order. Sev'ral of you is nearin' death, an' it'll be more seemly if you preserves some appearance of dignity doorin' your last moments on y'earth. Professor De Scruff—what do I say!—Puff will now onbuckle for the wind-up.'

"'Well,' observes the Professor, drawin' a harassed

breath, 'as I turns to the Creole, a person whose name is onimportant—'

"'I'm shore sorry to interfere,' remarks Cherokee, as suave as a dancin' master, 'but I fails to gather in that last. What did you say, Professor, is the name of the gent?'

"'I says his name is onimportant,' observes the Professor, plumb desp'rate.

"'I knows a party,' vouchsafes Boggs, 'whose name is Orin Portant; but he's lynched over in Socorro.'

"'This is too much!' cries Jack, graspin' his artillery. 'Everybody fill his hand! I'm the onmixed son of desolation, an' it's yere an' now I enters upon my c'lamitous an' devastatin' march!'

"As Jack utters the last word, both his guns go off together, an' the bombardment sets in with a crash. It's a riotous medley of flash an' roar! Every man jack is blazin' away with two six-shooters, the sides an' roof is plugged as full of holes as a colander, an' the effect is all that could be wished. With the first shot all the lamps blinks out; thar we be in the dark—a powder-smokin' pandemoneyum of gun-fire an' uproar!

"As the foosilade fetches loose, the Professor gives one disparin' yell an' starts to plow his way through. Pistols bark an' spit about his shrinkin' y'ears, an' each time it augments his enthoosiasm. Slight an' paper-backed as he is, onder the spur of a great desire, he parts the crowd like water, breshin' aside sech minor obstructions as Boggs an' Tutt an' Texas as though they're no more'n shadows. In the end he escapes, howlin' an' screechin',

into the street. No, he don't eemerge through no door; he's got 'way beyond doors! He simply t'ars the entire front out of the old Lady Gay, an' vanishes into the night. We marks his flight by y'ear. He gets further an' further off to'ards the north, runnin' like a antelope, evolvin' a screech with every leap, an' leavin' a screamin' tail like a vocal comet behind.

"'This yere,' says Boggs in his whole-souled hearty way, as he desists from his labors, 'constitootes what I regyards as a perfect evenin'. I now moves we rendesvoos at the Red Light without annoyin' delays. Which this yere salt-peter in the atmosphere shore renders me as dry as any powder horn.'

"'It's absoloote ver'ty, gents!' declar's the Professor a heap breathless to them sports in Tucson, which meetrop'lis he reaches next evenin'. 'That onbaptized group of murderers an' man-eaters called Wolfville is no more! I stays till the finish, an' makes a nose to nose canvass of the corpses. It's as I tells you: forty dead an' fourteen hundred wounded past recovery.'"

CHAPTER XXIX

CASH BOX AND MRS. BILL

WITH us her name is always 'Missis Bill,'" observed the Old Cattleman, his manner betraying a respect so deep it trenched on reverence, "while his is 'Cash Box Billy.' As a household, they don't remain long enough to get reelly rooted among us none, seein' they're promoted by the Express Company, inside of six months, to a p'sition twict as good some'ers up about the Dalls. At that their stay is s'fficient so we always recalls Cash Box with feelin's of friendly regyard, while as to Missis Bill we never hears that matron's name without takin' off our hats.

"Which the conjoogal example of that remark'ble pa'r becomes a never-flaggin' argyooment in the mouth of Missis Rucker, on them occasions she engages in j'int deebate with Peets an' mebby Texas, touchin' the blessin's to flow from lady soopremacy in the fam'ly.

"'Matrimonyal success,' says Missis Rucker, 'is to be secoored only when the wife's the onchecked head of the house. Her motives is purer, her intellects is stronger, her nacher is cleaner strain, an besides she's got more sense.' Sayin' which, Missis Rucker commonly falls back on Missis Bill an' Cash Box, as beyond cavil establishin' her claims.

"Shore; sech dispootations is freequent, for Texas feels plenty deep as to wedlock, him havin' suffered, while Peets likes to do it for relaxation. As to Missis Rucker, I figgers sometimes her conscience pricks her concernin' Rucker; an' its to jestify herse'f to herse'f, more'n anything else, she indulges in them discussions. Now an' then Boggs, who's easy moved, gets excited an' onloads a few blurred views. Nacherally, they don't count none, bein' nothin' more'n a re-hash of what Peets already utters, Boggs holdin'—an' rightful—that Peets is the intellectchooal colossus of the Southwest.

"Them bickers is a heap edifyin'; an' for myse'f, while I'm never that courageous I takes part, I likes to set an' listen. Speakin' gen'ral, they comes off at chuck time across the table at the O. K. House, Missis Rucker feedin' sometimes along with us; an' its shore entertainin', after she evolves some speshul reason, provin' how the best of husbands is mere six-spots in the marital deck that a-way, seldom high or low an' never jack nor game, to see her turn on Rucker—who's waitin' on the outfit—an' say:

"'You go round up some rice puddin'; an' see that them Mexicans in the kitchen don't hold out none on the raisins neither!'

"Rucker'll be glowerin' like a indignant hedgehawg behind Missis Rucker's back, but you bet he don't let her ketch him at it. She's got him that redooced, all he dar's say is 'Yes'm!' mighty tame an' obedient, as he vamoses in quest of them viands.

"Why don't I never take no sides? What's the good

of me gettin' all chawed up over questions which, from my onmarried standp'int is wholly academic? Not but what I has opinions; for I holds then, as I holds now, that a household don't necessar'ly mean a tandem, an' thar's sech a thing in nacher as husband an' wife travellin' abreast. Still, I ain't so simple as to go expressin' these yere beliefs. Which Missis Rucker an' Peets an' Texas that a-way, their blood bein' up, would make me look like a hen partridge at a mass-meetin' of minks!

"'You onderstands,' Texas'd say, 'I don't counsel no gent to wed; speshully when the lady's bent on bein' range boss for the outfit. Still, if a gent's that perverse, he might jest as well shet his eyes an' go it blind. He can gamble no matter who he marries, he'll wake up some off-mornin' an' find she's someone else. Do you-all reckon,' he goes on, gettin' excited an' backin' up on his own pers'nal injuries—'do you-all reckon my Laredo wife acts prior like she does later on? Well I should shore say not!'

"'Whatever does she do, Texas?' asks Faro Nell, who's plenty inquis'tive.

"'What does she do?' repeats Texas. 'Nell, before I espouses that lady, butter'd freeze in her mouth. Turtle doves is hen-hawks by compar'son! Two weeks after, she goes hectorin' round about ten thousand dollars I has cached in the bank. She weeps night an' day, an' allows through her tears that it ought to be in her name same as mine; then if I blinks out inadvertent, she protects herse'f, her check bein' good.'

"'An' whatever is your reply?' asks Nell.

"'What would any bliss-locoed mav'rick reply?' returns Texas, mighty sore. 'Which I'm that fatuous I yields. An' Nell, the next mornin' after I puts that treasure in both our names, she trapses down to the bank, draws out the entire roll, an' slaps it into another bank to her own sole use an' behoof, barrin' me complete.'

"'An' then?" Boggs breaks in, Texas pausin' to uplift himse'f mod'rate with a calabash of Old Jordan.

"'An then?' repeats Texas, full of scorn. 'Thar ain't no then! When I goes pirootin' round to that money institootion, aimin' to lay ba'r her perfidy an' recover my rights, the cashier turns hostile at me from inside his brass cage, an' whangs away with a six-shooter, allowin' I'm out to rob the safe.'

"'An' don't your wife offer no explanations?' pursoos Nell.

"'Shore! She's like Missis Rucker, an' defends her game on the ground she's got more sense than me.'

"'Moreover,' interjecks Missis Rucker, smoothin' down her bib, plumb satisfied, 'while it's no part of the O. K. Restauraw's economy, to go round harrassin' the boarders without doo cause, an' although this yere Laredo lady's strange to me entire, it's my idee she proves it.'

"'That ain't all,' groans Texas, not heedin' Missis Rucker; 'after she cleans me up for my bundle, she gives it out that, onless I'm round home more evenin's, she'll seequestrate my clothes. Tharupon I resolves to beat her to it. I throws my duds into a big chest, puts on a padlock, an hides the key. Gents, it never bothers her a bit! She simply claps on another padlock alongside of

mine, an' thar, in one move, she has me out on a desolate limb! After sech heartless exploits, do you-all wonder how, matrimonyal, I'm plumb ready to pack in? Why I welcomes that divorce, same as a lifer down at Huntsville does a pardon!'

"'The trouble, Texas,' says Enright, his tones gentle, him feelin' sorry for Texas—'the trouble is you're some too old when she ties you down. Husbands, to get best results, must be caught young.'

"'Old!' exclaims Texas. 'Why, I'm only forty-one when I'm entrapped.'

"'Which is twenty years too late!' persists Enright. 'Take a yooth of twenty-one, an' saw him off on some lady not otherwise engaged, an' it's odds on thar's no more trouble to come of it than between a kitten an' a sasser of warm milk. At twenty-one, hooman nacher is like wet buckskin, an' stretches or shrinks as occasion reequires.'

"But to hark back: Cash Box Billy is the money gent for the Express Company. Thar's two people at the express office, Cash Box an' a darklin' party whose name is Andy Ball. Because this latter sport's the color of a Mexican, with black eyes an' black ha'r, an' has besides a sort o' midnight manner, we calls him, indiscrim'nate, 'Black Andy' an' 'Black Ball,' Boggs favorin' the latter, him claimin' that the sight of Black Ball makes him feel like a loser.

"Black Ball bein' single, that a-way, don't have no wife, while Cash Box is a married gent of thirty years standin', bein' acquired former by Missis Bill at the age Enright recommends. Him an' Black Ball takes charge of the ex-

press office in yoonison, the company shiftin' the coyotes, who's been holdin' down the play, to sityooations East.

"When Cash Box comes romancin' along, we nacherally looks him over plumb severe. An for good an' s'fficient reasons, we usin' the Express Company same as if it's a bank. It's thar we mows away our sooperfluous money, said wealth—Cherokee keepin' his bankroll thar, same as the balance of us—commonly mountin' to as good as eighty thousand dollars.

"The Express Company tucks this yere treasure away in a steel box inside the big safe, Cash Box packin' the only key. Bein' he's the party, tharfore, app'inted to ride herd on our wealth, an' sech mir'cles havin' been heard of as the gent thus distinguished evaporatin' with the riches committed to his charge, we-all regyards Cash Box mighty intent, when he first blows in, strivin' to get a idee of what resks we're up ag'inst. Which the more we considers Cash Box, the more secoore we begins to feel. One look into that honest easy-goin' face of his stampedes every doubt.

"The same can't be uttered none consernin' Black Ball. In spite of him bein' soft-voiced an' aff'ble, he's that sinister as to set you reachin' for a copper every time circumstances compels you to place a bet on him. Don't you ever notice that in folks, son? Thar's people you trusts at the drop of the hat; thar's others from whom your s'picions never lifts their eyes. Explain it? When I do I'll explain why you makes a pet of sheep dogs an' not of snakes. Every gent in camp breathes freer, when we learns how Black Ball ain't goin' to be tangled up, per-

s'nal, with our *dinero*. Which we'd sooner have took chances on totin' it in our boots!

"Black Ball's dead now, an' it shore don't become me none to go speakin' ill of any gent over whom the grass is wavin's, but between us, before Black Ball goes with the Express Company, he's a lawyer at the Noo York bar. However, he's took the big dark jump, so let it slide; thar's no use rakin' up a onforchoonate past. He shore quits bein' a Noo York lawyer a whole lot before ever we meets up with him, an' who shall say he ain't actchooated of reepentance an' a impulse to reform? Notwithstandin' he's out for the camp's bundle when bumped off by Missis Bill, I sees no reason to deeprive him of this yere doubt.

"Cash Box is bald, an' five feet tall, an' his face is as round an' open as a bull's eye watch. What he lacks in physical elevation, he makes up in breadth an' depth, an' if he was to get knocked over, he wouldn't fall, he'd roll. Besides, he's as bland an' even-tempered as a Joone night, an' no more donnin' airs or puttin' on a bulge than a bunch of voylets.

"Missis Bill don't look no more like Cash Box than a queen of clubs. She's a head taller, raw-boned, onstinted as to hands an' feet, a jaw like the rock of ages, an' thin wispy ha'r all streaked of gray. She's had the smallpox too, an' shows it; an' some'ers along the trail she's gone shy a eye. All told, thar's reason for assoomin', with Jack Moore, that Cash Box, when he resolves to wed her, comes to sech concloosion by candle light.

"An' yet, thar's somethin' mighty good an' reefreshin'

about Missis Bill. That one optic burns an' beams with a steady gen'rous gleam that's shore fed from the heart direct, an' like a light in a window shines out through the dark for troubled people who have lost their way. Every soul in the outfit likes Misses Bill; an', as for little Enright Peets, he nacherally dotes on her. An' well that blessed infant may! She stuffs him with sweet-meats an' del'cacies to that degree he grows ten pounds heavier in two weeks, an' alarms the camp. Peets has to give him drugs.

"Most of all, Missis Bill looks after Cash Box. She not only directs but she transacts his destinies, an' is to him in all things owner, mother, wife an' slave. He w'ars what she says, eats what she provides, sleeps when she tells him to, gets up when she calls, an' daylight or dark, sun-up or sun-down, lives an' breathes an' comes an' goes by her decrees.

"An' Cash Box likes it. Talk of infatchooations; why Cash Box is simply wropped up in Missis Bill! That lady's his religion!

"'Ain't Missis Bill the limit?' he says, joyful to the edge of eediocy; 'ain't she the mother of all flowers?'

"'Right you be, Cash Box!" Faro Nell replies, for Nell's pleased at him thinkin' so much of Missis Bill. 'She's every thing you says! Ain't Missis Bill plumb lovely, Cherokee?'

"'Missis Bill's a green tree an' a fountain!' Cherokee returns; 'she's shore the shadow of a great rock in a weary land!'

"'Thar's folks,' goes on Cash Box, who's encouraged

by Nell's enthoosiasm, an' Cherokee backin' her play, 'who laughs, an' allows I'm henpecked. Do I give 'em a argyooment at sech times? Never! Which I'm merely proud! I glories to be pecked by sech a hen!'

"'An' see how she takes care of you!' exclaims Nell. 'If you're her own infant child, you couldn't be in stronger than you be!'

"'That's whatever!' echoes Cash Box; 'that's what I weds her for—to be took care of. Before I hooks up with that one-eyed angel, I'm crawlin' out o' one hole only to fall into another twict as deep. Life's made up of them holes. Since she took charge of me, I've been campin' on the high ground an' livin' on the fat. Why-ever shouldn't I mind her smokes? Missis Bill's forgot more'n I know. She saveys more in a minute than sech tarrapins as me does in a month of Sundays. Some folks takes out insurance pol'cies; I takes out a marriage licence, an' yoonites with Missis Bill. That's me!—that's cunnin' old Cash Box every time!'

"'Which Cash Box,' exclaims Boggs, who's emotional an' gets freequent swept away—'which Cash Box is certainly the finest little fat man whose trail I ever cuts!'

"'You bet your guns I be!' replies Cash Box. 'Also, a pet fox is foolish alongside of me! An' all, onderstand me, by virchoo of Missis Bill. When I'm with her, I walks by the light of her glance; when I'm away, I feels she's thar jest the same like the stars at noon, invis'ble mebby, but shinin' on serene an' white an' steady! Oh I knows my business; thar ain't a moment I don't go needin' Missis Bill. Shore, I'm strong like a hoss; but I

reequires Missis Bill to hitch me up an' drive me, before ever I can haul a load. I'm same as a steel spring; I has to be pressed down in order to exert my strength, an' Missis Bill's that pressure. An' lib'ral? She ain't no one to go muzzlin' the ox when he treadeth out the corn. Not much! When her an' me's discussin' rum, I ups an' says: "Old lady; how about me quilin' 'round four libations of a evenin'? Don't you reckon four is plenty?" Missis Bill ponders some, an' shakes her head: "Make it five, Cash Box," she says; "thar's luck in odd numbers, an' that fifth hooker won't never down you none." As for Fo'th of Jooly an' Christmas, at sech seasons she takes my hobbles off an' throws me loose, free to become as scand'lous as I likes.'

"'Thar's no doubt about it!' coincides Boggs, mighty fervent; 'Missis Bill has got the right idee!'

"'What amooses me,' continyoos Cash Box, who's thar with the goods about Missis Bill as long as folks'll listen—'what amooses me is how some people expects I'm goin' to be ashamed because I'm run by Missis Bill. Why it's my boast!—my one best bet! Once thar's a editor person who waxes facetious about it, an' prints in his paper:

> "'C—h B—x is a careful bird,
> He won't so much as cheep,
> Nor ever dare to breathe a word,
> Except his wife's asleep.'

"'Do I grow weary or sore? On the contrary I seeks out that son of the mooses, an' offers ten dollars a stanza for more, an' go as far as he likes.'

"It's about fifth drink time in the evenin' when Cash Box onfurls the last, an'—the same bein' her custom constant—Missis Bill floats by the Red Light door. It's the reg'lar signal; Cash Box up-ends his glass, an' meanders forth. An' so, side by side, they p'ints away into the dark for their one storey wickeyup, out on the edge of town, Missis Bill holdin' 'ffectionately by Cash Box's arm, an' him skurce up to her shoulder.

"'Look at 'em!" exclaims Peets, full of admiration; 'look at 'em, Sam! Which they've got Paul an' Virginny wiped plumb off the pampas!'

"'They certainly be calk'lated,' returns Enright, 'to excite envy in single folks.'"

CHAPTER XXX

MRS. BILL'S PROTECTORATE

MISSIS Bill is born in Texas, which let me say in passin' is a mighty turgid commonwealth. Also, while she's roast apples an' cream towards Cash Box an' the rest of us, she fully jestifies that Lone Star em'nation. She can protect herse'f as well as Cash Box, saveys a six-shooter as complete as ever she saveys a needle, an' shoots as fine as she sews. One mornin' a rapid fire foosilade breaks out over back of the Cash Box shack. Thar ain't a gent in camp could have shook them loads out quicker, not even Cherokee.

"'It's all right,' says Texas, comin' up; 'it's only Missis Bill. She opens on a rattlesnake, whose pitched camp on her door step, an' she shore does bust him up a heap! That fool reptile's in seven pieces before ever he c'llects his wits. She's certainly some nimble with a Colt's-45, is Missis Bill; it looks like she not only w'ars the trousers, but packs the gun.'

"Like everybody else in town, onless it's Cash Box, Missis Bill ain't got no use for Black Ball. Cash Box himse'f is sort o' fond of Black Ball. Of course this yere leanin' on the part of Cash Box don't mean nothin', him bein' that egreegiously sunny he's fond of everybody —fond of Mexicans—fond even of Rucker. An' he

does his best to indooce Missis Bill to stand for Black Ball; but no, it ain't in the deck. She can't bring herse'f to so much as tol'rate him.

"'An' why not?' asks Cash Box. 'Tell me, so I won't like him none myse'f.'

"'No,' returns Missis Bill, 'thar's no sense in doin' that. You go on likin' him; I'd like to like him if I could, but I can't. Somehow thar's that about him which reeminds one powerful of Davy Crockett's log, which stick of timber's that crooked it couldn't lay still. An' yet, Cash Box, I don't hold this Black Ball reespons-'ble for my feelin' averse to him. I reckons he can't no more he'p bein' dislikeable that a-way, than I can he'p dislikin' him. Only Cash Box,' concloods Missis Bill, plenty serious, 'don't trust him—don't take no chance on him!' An' nacherally, sech bein' his habit, Cash Box allows he won't.

"'You knows me, Missis Bill,' he says; 'you're onto the lovin' curves of your little Cash Box! You speaks, I jumps; that's my system! Also, it goes either way, an' black is white or chalk is cheese accordin' as ycu says.'

"Wharupon Missis Bill bestows upon Cash Box one of them looks that means pie three times a day, an', after kissin' her so it sounds like a pony's foot in the mud, Cash Box goes pirootin' off to the express office on the trail of them daily dooties. An' yet all that bluff about him not trustin' Black Ball is, so far as Cash Box is concerned, a waste of words, as none is onto better than Missis Bill herse'f. Cash Box don't know what the word 's'picion' means; he's born that blind. Which

he's that confidin' he'd set a rattlesnake to dry-nuss a baby jackrabbit, an' then be plumb puzzled because the little rab seems absent later on.

"What with Black Ball bein' by nacher secret, an' us not interested in him no how, thar ain't a sport in camp who's got the slightest notion of him. He works an' he eats an' he rolls into his blankets nights, an' that's about as far as our knowledge goes. For example that Black Ball's the most locoed hooman bein' to gamble, who ever figgers in the social life of South West Arizona. But said information never breaks on us until it deevelopes subsequent at the hearin' which, for the looks of things, precedes the obsequies. An' even then it fills us with as much amazement as a milk-crock from a high shelf.

"Still, our ignorance ain't hard to onderstand, since Black Ball is plenty heedful not to do his kyard playin' in either Wolfville or yet Red Dog. He's mighty seldom in the Red Light, an' never sets in ag'inst Cherokee's bank. Not but what, if he does, he'd be as much in fash'nable line as a nigger in Timbuctoo. But he don't none; an' since no gent of reefinements, an' I might say proodence, goes round askin' questions, it never dawns on us that them three or four days each month he puts in over in Tucson, he devotes to green-cloth specyoolations entire.

"Sech, however, is the interestin' case; an' we hears at the Oriental S'loon that, only show Black Ball a faro layout an' endow him with a hatful of chips, he goes plumb wild an' cimarron. They plays a lib'ral game in Tucson, two hundred on doubles an' a hundred on

the turn, an' yet once he gets to goin' sech limits is irksome to him. He whines an' pleads for latitoode, an' when it's granted he bets 'em higher than the roof.

"No gent ever arises to su'gest that Black Ball gets crooked action, doorin' them gamblin' fits of his. Moreover, on the first two occasions he cuts loose, his luck is that profoose he fairly wins the kyarpets off the floor; his profits runs into thousands. As freequent occurs, however, Black Ball's luck don't hold out; at mebby the third settin' he plays in not only all he's ahead, but goes dead broke besides. Worse, when he does shove back, thar's markers waitin' for him to the toone of thirty-seven hundred dollars. Black Ball explains to the dealer that he'll send over the thirty-seven hundred by the next stage, an', Wolfville credit bein' considerable above timberline in Tucson, the sport back of the deal-box offers no demur.

"Black Ball keeps his word; although he does it, accordin' as Cash Box tabs up the racket followin' the fooneral, at Boggs' expense. Boggs it seems wanders in at noon, when Cash Box himse'f is gorgin' on Missis Bill's midday feed, an' leaves five thousand to go into the company's steel coffers that a-way. Boggs gives it to Black Ball, who's the only gent in sight, an' he's to turn it over to Cash Box, when he drifts in from his chuck.

"But, bein' he's in the hole for them thirty-seven hundred it looks like the temptation's too much for Black Ball. He peels the amount off Boggs' roll, an' gives Cash Box only thirteen hundred. Shore, he ain't

mentionin' the deeficiency, but lets on thirteen hundred is all Boggs changes in. Which if he had, it's a heap likely thar'd have come some stirrin' moments Boggs bein' a prey to all sorts of rannikaboo impulses, when he's robbed. As it is, Cash Box receives the thirteen hundred, slings it into the steel box, clicks the key, enters it in his little old book, an' stands innocently pat.

"Enright, when we returns from plantin' Black Ball among the 'llustrious dead on Boot Hill gives his theery of eevents.

"'When Black Ball skins Dan's roll,' says Enright, 'he's honest enough an' intends to make good, regyardin' it as a cinch that Cash Box falls for his request to sign the note he aims to discount. After Missis Bill interferes an' Cash Box don't sign no note, an' seein' he's in wrong about Dan's thirty-seven hundred, Black Ball resolves to *vamos* with every splinter in the till, an' begin life afresh. Don't you reckon that's it, Doc?'

"'Sech s'lootion,' says Peets, 'is shore a heap consistent.'

"Havin' dispatched the thirty-seven hundred to the kyard sharp in Tucson, Black Ball goes at Cash Box in a manner which for him is mighty genial. He intimates he's got his eye on a lady he's goin' to marry, an' reequires five thousand dollars to back the play.

"'At first,' says Black Ball, keepin' up a great air of glee, 'I shrinks back from becomin' a married man. You recalls that old bluff about the frogs, Cash Box, an' how, no matter how bad they wants water, they refooses to jump in a well because they can't get out none ag'in?

That's the way with me; I'm held back by that frog view I takes of wedlock. It's beholdin' you an' Missis Bill together does the trick; it's that which shore crystalizes my resolootion a heap. She'll be mighty near as good a wife as yours, Cash Box; an' as for the note, said instroomeent's a mere matter of form that a-way.'

"'I thinks so to,' returns Cash Box; 'only I'll go ask Missis Bill.'

"Black Ball's hopes of Missis Bill ain't over bright, an' he gives Cash Box a argyooment, an' even deescends to taunt him some. He declar's that a gent who won't sign notes for a pard is that mean an' ornery, if he owns a lake he wouldn't give a duck a drink. It's all one to Cash Box, obd'rate in his docility; he's certainly goin' to get the views of Missis Bill, he says.

"'Well,' concloods Black Ball, when he finds Cash Box immov'ble, 'we'll write it out, an' you can take it along an' show her it ain't no trant'ler.'

"So Black Ball writes out the note payable to the Tucson bank, an' him an' Cash Box signs up. Then Cash Box goes weavin' over, an' submits the docyooment to Missis Bill. That lady reads it, takes the shears which hangs by a string from her belt, an' cuts off the signachoor of Cash Box.

"'Carry Black Ball that,' she says, givin' Cash Box the note ag'in, his own name bein' off; 'carry it back; it's his. Your name, which is yours, I'll keep.'

"'Missis Bill's ag'in us,' says Cash Box. 'She declar's that promises to pay money becomes as the worm that dieth not an' the fire which is not quenched; an',

nacherally, sech observations from sech a source lets me plumb out.'

"Black Ball makes no reply, but bites away at his dark lip.

"This yere's at noon; an' while Black Ball an' Cash Box is foolin' an' fussin' over their express business the balance of the day, Black Ball ain't sayin' a word. As they're lockin' up for the night, he onbuckles a trifle.

"'You saveys, Cash Box,' he says, puttin' out his long, lean hand to shake, 'that I ain't got no feelin' ag'in you?'

"'Shore!' says Cash Box, takin' Black Ball's hand.

"As they sep'rates, Black Ball comes round on his heel ag'in, like he remembers somethin'.

"'Oh!' he remarks, 'I'm mighty near over-lookin' a bet. Let me have the key to the steel box; thar's a tangle in my books, an' I'll have to prance round some early tomorry mornin' to straighten it out. Which I must go over the checks an' cash to do it.'

"Cash Box is that guileless he gives Black Ball the key onhesitatin'. Black Ball knows the comb'nation to the main door of the big safe, for it's thar he hives his books nights. As for the office itse'f, both of 'em has door keys.

"Eevents ondoubted would have worked out to Black Ball's satisfaction an' our loss, if it ain't that his designs strikes the onexpected an' glances off. They caroms on Missis Bill, an' that lady's protectorate over Cash Box, a excellent feachure wharof is her ropin' onto Cash Box's keys, the instant he shows in the door. That

partic'lar evenin', when Cash Box only offers her the big key, Missis Bill can't onderstand.

"'Where's the little key to the steel box?' she asks.

"Cash Box explains. Missis Bill's face takes on a worry look, an' her one eye exhibits symptoms. An' yet she don't like to go harrowin' Cash Box up.

"'Only,' she says, sort o' considerin' the business, 'I shore wisht you-all hadn't a-done it none.'

"'*Yo tambien*, now you says so,' returns Cash Box. 'Which it'll be all right, however; Black Ball wouldn't no more go minglin' with that cash from crim'nal motives, than Old Monte'd quit nosepaint. Thar ain't a chance!'

"Cash Box is mighty confident, but somehow, Missis Bill don't feel so plumb shore.

"'I can't go ask Black Ball for the key now,' explains Cash Box, replyin' to the look in Missis Bill's lone eye; 'it'd be same as sayin' he's a thief.'

"'Troo,' assents Missis Bill, 'it's too late now.'

"Cash Box, who's out o' reach of worry only as he ketches it second hand from Missis Bill, lights his seegyar after supper, an' wanders down to the Red Light for them legit'mate five drinks. Havin' absorbed 'em, he in doo time says *adios* to the assembled company, an' organizes for home.

"'Late hours,' says he, 'don't do for married gents; speshully when they has wives like Missis Bill. Which I'd sooner be that lady's husband than draw the wages of a king.'

"'Don't it strike you, Cash Box,' observes Peets, who likes to tease folks who seems el'gible tharunto—'don't

it strike you-all as borderin' on the mirac'lous, that sech a bein' as Missis Bill is caught travelin' in your company?'

"'It shore does!' returns Cash Box plenty stout. 'Still, you finds some mighty bafflin' comb'nations in this yere life. You recalls how the Savior rides into Jeroosalem on a burro that time.'

"It's one of the drawbacks to the possession of great intellects that, the more mind a party has, the more that party has on it. While Cash Box sleeps like a dead man, Missis Bill, who can't get her thoughts off Black Ball, remains as wakeful as squinch owls. At last, to peacefy her own nerves, she gets up, dons a frock, wrops a shawl about her, adjusts her shaker, an' starts for the express office which is on the fringe of the camp.

"That time former, when Missis Bill gets married, the nuptials is pulled off at the Four-J ranch. It's her pap, old Bill Blackburn, who owns the Four-J outfit. As she an' Cash Box goes arrangin' for the get-away to Hillsboro, where they aims to pass the honeymoon, old man Blackburn approaches with tears in his eyes.

"'My child,' he says to Missis Bill, 'on this yere solemn occasion let me, accordin' to the customs of our house, endow you-all with the Blackburn fam'ly jooels;' an', with that, he passes Missis Bill his Colt's-45—cartridge belt, scabbard an' all.

"As Missis Bill caparisons herse'f for that midnight trip to the express office, she buckles on the ancestral weepon. It's the one she bombards the rattlesnake with, an' she's plumb familiar with it.

"Next to the express office is the corrals; but thar's

nobody thar at midnight, the greasers who should, bein' one an' all over in Chihuahua, wearin' out their moccasins at Santa Rosa's dance hall, or losin' the coats off their improv'dent backs at chuck-a-luck an' monte. As Missis Bill approaches the express office, she notes two things that sends her heart into her mouth. The door to the office is on the swing; also, through the gloom an' shadows, she makes out a party on a pony, jest ridin' out of the corral.

"Without a genius for promptitood, life in Arizona slumps off into failure; an' so troo is this that even the ladies final becomes plenty prone to get thar on time with both feet. Missis Bill, the instant she sees the open door, an' the mustange gent in the shadows, reaches for old dad Blackburn's gun.

"'Hands up!' says Missis Bill, as she works her six-shooter to the front, an' Jack Moore himse'f couldn't have give the call-down more abrupt.

"The answer is a shot from the party on the pony, which flies high; then he drives home his spurs, an' charges Missis Bill to ride her down.

"The idee is good, all things considered, but it breaks down in the execootion. The pap Blackburn six-shooter cracks, an' the chargin' gent comes whirlin' out o' the saddle like a shot wild duck. He clears his feet from the stirrups, as he comes over the saddle horn, an' the freed pony wheels an' runs back into the corral.

"Yes, it's Black Ball; an', since Missis Bill's bullet ketches him as squar' between the eyes as you-all could put your finger, it goes without sayin' that he's concloo-

sively not to add exhaustively dead, when he hits the grass. That he comes off over the saddle-horn, that a-way, is enough of itse'f to show he's all in. When a gent's goin' to get well, he falls backward; when he's plugged plumb center, he comes for'ard onto his face. Thar's mighty clost onto ninety thousand dollars on Black Ball when Missis Bill stops him;—the bankroll of the entire camp!

"'That little incident of Black Ball,' says Missis Bill a month later, when the Express Company offishuls asks her to name her reward—'that little incident of Black Ball, gents, has sort o' sp'iled the camp for me; an', if you-all jest as soon, I'd shore like to have you shift Cash Box to some station further off.'

"'Ain't Missis Bill the lion-hearted lady?' says Cash Box, as he comes down to the Red Light to say 'good-by' the evenin' before him an' Missis Bill goes squanderin' off for the Dalls; 'ain't she the guardian angel of the broad an' sweepin' wing? Well I should yell!'

"'She's a lady to be proud of, Cash Box!' replies Enright. 'An' now thar's another matter: Nacherally, the boys feels some grateful to Missis Bill. They was roundin' themselves up to give her a banquet; but, upon reflection, rum not bein' her long suite, they reeluctantly puts the notion by. Tharfore, Cash Box, you give Missis Bill the best compliments of the outfit, an' say that she'll find a silver tea-set, branded with her 'nitials, waitin' at your company's joint in Tucson; said tea-set bein' a jo-darter, or old Sam Enright ain't no jedge!'"

THE END

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